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"LOST IN DAYDREAMS, MISS KEITH!" SAID MAURICE DOUGLAS.

TWO GIRLS.

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CHAPTER I.

No one had any idea how the idea originated, most certainly diamonds had never been found in the locality, and, as the Tudors' estate was situated in the very heart of Northshire, it could hardly properly be described as the "end" of anything; but the name had been given by some Squire who flourished in a bygone century, and it had stuck to the property ever since almost as tenaciously as their prosperity had clung to the Tudors, who were a wonderfully successful race, their "luck" being almost a proverb among their neighbours.

Richard Tudor (they mostly affected historical names, as suggesting their connection with Royalty) was a tall, handsome old man with a stately bearing and open, generous hand. He had not expected to come in for the estate, being only a younger son; but his elder brother had done something of a very disgraceful nature, and was compelled by their father to join in cutting off the entail, so that the old Squire could leave all he possessed to his favourite child.

It was worth having, too—one of the finest properties in Northshire—a clear ten thousand a year, and any amount of plate, furniture, and jewels.

He would have been more than human had he not enjoyed his inheritance, and as he had been a mere boy at the time of Edmund's disgrace he could hardly feel much pity for a half-brother of whom he had not heard for wellnigh fifty years.

One cross there was in his lot, one drop of gall in his cup. Twice married he had no child. His present wife, a very beautiful woman, had given him two sons, who died in infancy.

After long years of vain regret, at last, in despair of having an heir of his own, Mr. Tudor adopted one of his wife's nieces—a bright, dark-eyed girl, who was a great favourite in the county.

"Gladys must marry young, and her husband take the name of Tudor," was the old gentleman's decision, and his wife agreed with him.

She was a good ten years younger than the Squire. Strong and healthy, active, and energetic, the idea never came into his head she would not survive him, and he left her everything he possessed, confident she would carry out his wishes

regarding Gladys Keith, who, as her own niece was very dear to her.

Miss Keith's prospects being so brilliant, as was natural she had many suitors. It was known that Mr. Tudor meant to give her a handsome portion, and entail the property on her and her heirs subject to Mrs. Tudor's life interest in it.

He and his wife were perfectly devoted to the pretty girl who made the sunshine of their home, and people round about considered Gladys as surely the heiress of Diamond End as though she had been the Squire's own child.

It was summer-time. Far away in the corn-fields the wheat had changed to a golden brown. The August sunshine poured full and warm on to the beautiful grounds of Diamond End, and Gladys Keith, in a white dress, sat under a spreading chestnut-tree on the lawn, a novel lying idly at her feet, her thoughts very far away.

She was very pretty, some people called her beautiful; but the greatest charm of her face was its expression.

The nut-brown hair, dark, dreamy brown eyes, and clear, creamy skin, might be attractive; but it was the smile on the parted lips, the intellect in

the dark eyes which lingered most in a stranger's memory.

Just now Gladys had a weighty problem to consider.

She was twenty, and already several lovers had come to her, due either to her own charms or her reputed heiress-ship; but not one of the proposals had touched her heart, and Mr. Tudor had not questioned her refusal, because none of the aspirants fulfilled his ambition for his heiress.

He wanted to give her to a man of unblemished character and good birth—one who did not stand so near the honour of his family that he would mind giving up his own name; and this was just what the lovers Gladys had dismissed would have refused; but now Miss Keith stood face to face with a difficulty.

Only yesterday Marmaduke Blake, the younger, son of a near neighbour, had asked the Squire's consent to his proposals. To-morrow Mr. Blake was coming for his answer, and Gladys knew perfectly that if she refused him her uncle would be furious.

Duke was such an old friend, too. She liked him warmly. She had not a single objection to urge against him, only she knew perfectly she did not love him; but her uncle would call that reason "sentimental rubbish." Indulgent to a fault, generally to Gladys, the Squire, when roused, was yet a veritable despot.

"Lost in day dreams, Miss Keith?"

Gladys looked up.

Some one had walked across the lawn from the house and now stood watching her with a look of deep admiration in his blue eyes.

Maurice Douglas loved Gladys, though his affection had nothing unselfish or disinterested about it.

He meant to win the Squire's heiress if possible, and apart from the fortune she was very dear to him; but all the same had Miss Keith not been heiress of Diamond End the young doctor would never have thought of proposing to her. He was an ambitious man and a poor one. He had his way to make in the world, and could not have afforded the luxury of a penniless wife.

Gladys blushed crimson at his question.

"I think I must have been," she answered, "for I never heard you coming, Mr. Douglas."

"The butler said your uncle would not be long. I should like to wait for I want to see the Squire particularly on some parish business."

"Uncle won't be long. Do sit down. Isn't it a beautiful day?"

"It is, indeed," he answered, seating himself at her side. "What is the matter, Miss Keith?"

"Nothing," she said, confusedly, "why do you ask?"

"Because, forgive me, I thought you had been crying. Miss Keith, Gladys, if only you would give me the right to share your burdens. My darling, don't you know I love you?"

His blue eyes looked straight into hers, and in the girl's heart a strange new happiness found birth; she knew then why she had found it impossible to care for her old playfellow Marmaduke Blake, and why, since Maurice Douglas took up his abode at Chilton the world had seemed so much brighter. Gladys knew her own secret now; she loved this handsome, struggling doctor, and for his sake she felt brave enough to face even her uncle's anger.

"Only one word," pleaded Mr. Douglas, "just one word of hope, dearest, and I shall have patience to wait until the Squire will listen to my wishes. I know at first he will not think me worthy of his beautiful Princess, but if only you are on my side, Gladys, I shall be able to bring him over."

And Gladys Keith whispered her answer in the sweet August sunshine. The man beside her had not asked her in so many words to marry him, he had not said "Will you be my wife," but no other interpretation could be placed on his words. His allusion to the Squire's consent proved that, and as her little hand stole into her lover's she felt herself as entirely his as though they had been betrothed in the most solemn, formal manner, and received the consent and blessing of their respective families.

Just ten minutes of perfect bliss, just ten

minutes in Paradise, and then the sound of wheels recalled Gladys to life's stern realities.

"It must be visitors," she said, with a regretful shrug of her shoulders. "Uncle was driving the dog-cart, and it sounds too heavy for that."

"I wonder Mrs. Tudor is not afraid of that high dog-cart, and your Uncle's frisky mare."

"Oh, Aunt Winifred is wonderfully young for her age; she isn't a bit like an old lady in her ways. I am much more nervous than she is."

She rose involuntarily and walked towards the house, Douglas sauntering beside her; he had not the least objection to being discovered by the new arrivals in Miss Keith's company, but, as they gained the hall, a warning glance from the butler alarmed him, the man's face was livid, he seemed to be imploring the doctor to stop his young mistress's approach.

"Gladys," said Maurice in a whisper, "I fancy there has been an accident, will you wait here while I go and enquire?"

"An accident," her face blanched, "that dreadful horse."

But she let Mr. Douglas half lead, half push her into her aunt's boudoir, while he went on alone to confer with the horror-stricken servants.

"What in the world has happened, Hawkins?"

"There's been an accident, sir, the mare bolted, and the master and mistress were both flung out. Fortunately a carriage was passing, and it's brought 'em home. Tom came on the box and ran up to tell us."

The boy-groom stood trembling on the terrace steps, the carriage was coming up the avenue slowly enough, for the pace had been purposely slackened to give the lad a chance of preparing the household for the catastrophe. The housekeeper was soon in the hall, and Gladys white and trembling heard the news.

"Both hurt," she whispered. "Oh, it is too terrible."

"There, there, Miss Gladys," said the kind old housekeeper, "things often turn out better than we expect, and it's a lucky chance the doctor's here, and we haven't to send half over the parish for him."

The first person to alight was Sir John Blake, an old gentleman who was Mr. Tudor's greatest friend; "It was the most awful thing," he told Douglas in a hurried whisper; "we were within sight and saw it all, mare bolted at a break-neck pace, and rushed down hill till she met a traction-engine, then she grew frantic, overturned the cart, and threw out my poor friends. We did our best to overtake her and give help, but we only came up with her after the accident."

Kindly hands had raised Mrs. Tudor, and carried her to the library, where they laid her on the sofa. Maurice Douglas was following the bearers, when Sir John called him back.

"You can do nothing for her," he said gently; "she was quite dead when we picked her up, only I wouldn't say so for fear it should get to that poor child too suddenly. Mr. Tudor still breathes. I am in hopes you may still restore him."

The master of the house was conscious; terrible as his injuries had been his brain was still clear and active, and his first words after Mr. Douglas had made a brief medical examination were,—

"Tell me plainly, man, which is it, life or death?"

Douglas hesitated, Sir John turned to him,—

"You had better do as he asks you. The Tudors come of a brave race and are not cowards."

"Death!"

The one word seemed almost forced from the young doctor. Gladys, who was kneeling by her uncle's side, gave a bitter cry, but Richard Tudor was perfectly calm.

"How long?" it was weakness not emotion which brought the break in the sentence, "do you give me?"

"An hour, perhaps two."

"Ah! Not long to set my house in order; but I saw to that long ago. Winifred and Gladys will be safe. My poor wife, if she could only come to me."

"You will go to her," said Sir John, deeply moved. "My dear, old friend, Mrs. Tudor was dead before we got to her."

"Dead!" a wondering look came into the pain-stamped face. "Dead! Well, we shall not be parted long."

And they were not. Maurice Douglas proved right in his sad verdict. Within an hour of being brought home Richard Tudor died. His last word was a blessing on the fair girl he had loved as his own child. His last farewell to his old friend was an appealing glance at Sir John, which the baronet answered quickly,—

"I will try to fill your place, Dick, even if she does not become my daughter."

It was over!

Gladys had been taken weeping from the room in the care of the good old housekeeper. Sir John went into the library. As Richard Tudor's oldest friend, as the probable father-in-law of his heiress, the baronet naturally took the lead in the last sad arrangements which had to be made. The butler followed him to supply the addresses of the relatives to whom telegrams must be sent; but both baronet and butler were a little surprised that Maurice Douglas should make a third at their consultation. Sir John looked askance at him. He did not like the young doctor, whom he regarded as "pushing," and a trifle impertinent, and he quietly ignored his presence.

"I shall wire to Messrs. Vesey and Vesey, your master's lawyers," said Sir John to Hawkins, "and to Mr. Robert Keith, I believe he was Mrs. Tudor's only brother?"

"The only one, sir, and the master had no kith or kin belonging to him, unless," the old servant spoke a little nervously, "Mr. Edmund should be alive."

"Why, it's fifty years and more since he left Diamond End," said Sir John, frankly, "and he'd be hard on eighty. I think we may put that idea out of our heads."

Maurice Douglas smarting at the cool way in which he was ignored came forward and faced the baronet defiantly.

"I think you are taking too much upon yourself, Sir John. As Miss Keith's future husband, it is my place to make these arrangements."

Sir John looked at him half-contemptuously.

"You'll not make me believe Miss Keith engaged herself to you clandestinely, and I happen to know that her uncle believed her free."

"It was only this afternoon," said Douglas, feeling disconcerted at this cool reception of his news.

"Oh, indeed!" Sir John looked at him fixedly. "Well, when the will's read you'll probably find out whom poor Tudor has appointed Miss Keith's guardians, and can make your announcement to them. She's a minor you know, and considering her immense fortune, I should think her uncle would take proper precautions to protect her from mercenary designs."

"Do you dare to call me a fortune hunter?" thundered Maurice.

"I call you nothing. I have no desire to meddle in the least in your affairs. I am only concerned with those of my dead friend and his adopted daughter."

Mr. Douglas beat a retreat. The old butler looked anxiously at Sir John.

"It can't be true, sir. Miss Gladys would never take up with such as he. Why it's said in Chilton, he hasn't a relation belonging to him and was brought up in an asylum!"

"He wouldn't be the worse for that," said Sir John, frankly; "but, candidly, I don't like the fellow, Hawkins, and it would be a bitter pill to see him the owner of Diamond End; but young ladies are capricious, and—it may come to it."

Sir John went home, but the sad news had preceded him.

He met his second son in the park on his way to Diamond End, to enquire into the extent of the calamity.

"Turn back with me, Duke," said Sir John, "I can tell you all about it, and I want to have a word with you, my boy."

Duke was six-and-twenty, not handsome or fascinating like Maurice Douglas, but with a quiet, thoughtful face, and gentle courtly manners. Children and servants adored Duke; animals were devoted to him. He had a

younger son's income, made money by literary pursuits, and would some day inherit his mother's portion, so that he was by no means penniless, though poor compared to such an heiress as Gladys Keith.

"It's no good, Duke; that beggar, Douglas, declares she is engaged to him. I can't bear the fellow, but I shouldn't think he'd dare to assert such a thing if there wasn't some truth in it."

"I expect it's true," said Duke, slowly. "I have noticed a great change in Gladys in the last year, and its just twelve months since Douglas came here. I wish I could be sure it wasn't her fortune he wanted."

"Well, Gladys is only twenty. Poor Tudor may have had the sense to defer her majority a few years and to leave her under sensible guardianship; I only hope he has."

"We shall not know till the funeral is over," said Marmaduke thoughtfully; "father, if it is as we fear, you and mother mustn't turn against Gladys, she will need friends more than ever."

Sir John sighed.

"If it had been anyone else; I never liked that Douglas and I never shall."

It was rather a surprise to Sir John to receive a letter from Mr. Vesey by the morning post acknowledging his telegram, and saying the lawyer was coming to Northshire by an early train and hoped to call at Copsleigh before going to Diamond End.

"Of course I know Vesey well enough, and a right-down good fellow he is," remarked the baronet, but why should he come to us, five miles north of the station and then go on to Diamond End, which is seven from here, when he might have asked me to meet him at poor Tudor's and have saved himself a good ten miles."

"Perhaps he wants to consult you," said Lady Blake, gently; "you may be left executor, or something of that sort."

But though he might question the lawyer's mode of travelling, Sir John was the soul of hospitality; a carriage was sent to meet Mr. Vesey at Chilton, and a late lunch prepared for his arrival. When he came Lady Blake thought he looked terribly upset, but then Richard Tudor had been his friend rather than client, and the intimacy had lasted over forty years.

She was a wise woman; not one word would she express of the curiosity she felt as to Mr. Tudor's will until lunch was over, and their visitor asked Sir John if he could spare him a half hour for business conversation; even then she did not ask to join the consultation, knowing her husband would be certain to give her a full and particular account of all that took place.

Sir John, however, suggested that his son should be present; in a few words he told Mr. Vesey that Marmaduke had proposed to Miss Keith, and but for the tragedy of yesterday would have been at Diamond End to-day for his answer. The old lawyer bowed.

"Then Mr. Marmaduke had better join us by all means."

They went into Sir John's smoking-room, but it was clear to both the Blakes they were to hear something unpleasant, though Mr. Vesey's opening words perplexed them.

"I suppose there is no reasonable room for doubt which expired first, the Squire or his wife?"

"Not the least," replied Sir John. "Mrs. Tudor was dead when she was lifted into my carriage; her husband lived and even spoke several times after he was brought home. I should say he survived his wife two hours."

"Five minutes would do the mischief," said the lawyer, with something like a groan, "and to think that I, with all my experience, should never have dreamed of such a contingency. Of course I should have been surprised at Mrs. Tudor's dying before her husband, but that they should be hurried out of the world so nearly together that he had no power to alter his will after her death I never dreamed of!"

"But what difference does it make?" asked Sir John, much bewildered.

"Difference! It makes Gladys Keith a beggar instead of an heiress. Mr. Tudor left everything he died possessed of to his wife, knowing he could trust her to act justly by their adopted child. The fact that Mrs. Tudor died first, makes the

will like so much waste paper. To all intents and purposes the Squire has died intestate, and his wife's niece, being no blood relation, can't claim a penny of his fortune."

The two men sat in silent amazement. At last Duke asked,—

"If Mrs. Tudor had outlived her husband, say by five minutes, what would have been the consequence?"

"Her living brother, Robert Keith, and Gladys Keith, as the representative of her dead brother, John, would have shared everything."

"And now Gladys is penniless."

"Penniless."

Marmaduke Blake drew a long breath of relief.

"I believe I'm thankful," he said to Sir John, taking no notice of the lawyer's incredulous face. "Now, if Maurice Douglas is the base, money-seeker we think him, he will leave her free. If he marries Gladys now, it must be for herself alone."

CHAPTER II.

It was a City office in one of the busiest parts of that great London which lies round about the Bank of England; a small place enough to look at from the outside, but then, rents in that neighbourhood were at a fancy price, and, unpretentious as was their abode, the firm of Paternoster and Hales employed more than twenty clerks, ranging in importance from the well-paid manager to the raw recruit at ten shillings a week.

One autumn morning the manager came out into the clerks' office with a rather troubled face. It was a time of commercial depression and when many sudden demands had to be met. He had discussed the matter thoroughly with his chiefs and they had decided three of the grown-up clerks were to be dismissed, and their places filled by lads fresh from school. It would save the partners, perhaps, two hundred a year. It was a cautious measure, and a prudent one, but Mr. Grigley had a kind heart, and he hated the task of giving the three doomed ones a quarter's notice.

He knew, none better, that the market was overstocked with clerks, and the fact that these poor fellows had been years in their present situation by no means guaranteed their finding another.

"At any rate they are unmarried," he thought to himself by way of consolation, "and a single man can live on very little."

But Owen Tudor, the eldest of the three unfortunates, found little encouragement from this fact. He had a mother and three half-sisters partly dependent on him. He found life a serious problem, even with a salary of a hundred and fifty a year, what would it be if he failed to gain another situation on leaving Paternoster and Hales.

He went home with a sad, desponding feeling that things were all against him. He lived in a little house in the lower part of Camberwell—one of those new districts where speculative builders have run up long rows of semi-detached villas, with bay windows and venetian blinds; ornamental enough in front, hideous at the back, but eminently convenient and very cheap at thirty pounds a year.

His mother had married again very soon after his father's death, and there were but five years between Owen and the eldest of his half-sisters.

The poor widow was desperately unfortunate in her second matrimonial venture, Mr. Montague being a scamp, with a handsome face, fascinating manners and romantic name. It was somewhat of a relief to her when he emigrated to Australia, and when from there news came of his death a few years later Helen Montague was not inconsolable.

She worked hard for her children while they were young, and still possessed a trifle of her own left her by her father and settled on herself, but of late she had depended chiefly on Owen's salary and the earnings of her eldest girl who taught in a neighbouring high school. Mrs. Montague probably made the young people's money go further than they would have done

themselves, but there was something rather grasping in the way she asserted her right to it, and Owen was painfully conscious how hard the case would be of telling her his bad news. Need he tell her? he asked himself as he turned into Rostrevor-road; the evil day was still three months' hence. Why not keep his secret, and so at least save himself a few weeks of her gloomy forebodings?

It was seven when Owen got home, the parlour was lighted up, and high tea was ready. Doris Montague, the school-teacher, was alone correcting some exercise books at a little table in the window. She looked up with a smile.

"You are awfully late, Owen, mother is getting into such a stew."

"I walked slowly—I'm tired. Where are the others?"

But they came in then, and tea begun, Mrs. Montague, a handsome, dark-eyed woman, looked searchingly at her son from her post behind the tea-tray.

"Owen," she exclaimed, suddenly, "you're eating nothing."

"I'm a little tired, mother."

"You've no right to feel tired," said Mrs. Montague, rather irritably. "Why, at your age a man ought to be as strong as a horse, but there, you're just like your father, and he was always complaining."

"Owen never complains," said one of the girls, hotly, "and you know, mother, it's awfully hot. It must have been stifling in London."

"It's wonderful weather for Michaelmas," admitted Mrs. Montague, "more like August; but a man ought not to feel the heat, and Owen's been in the city long enough to get used to its closeness. Did they remember your salary, Owen?"

Owen confessed they had.

"I was thinking," said his mother, slowly, "it's time you had a rise. You've been taking a hundred and fifty now for three years; unless you want to stop at that all your days, you ought to ask for an increase. I'll be bound you never thought of it, you are so careless."

"It would have been of no use," said Owen. "Trade's awfully bad. People are retrenching in every possible way."

"Well, you must ask at Christmas."

"I am afraid not, mother."

"Why?" she demanded, fretfully. "You'll never get on if you don't push a little. You're too meek-spirited by half."

Owen pushed away his plate with something like a groan.

"I would rather not have told you, mother, but you give me no choice. I am under notice to leave at Christmas."

"What have you done?"

"Nothing. I told you the firm were making retrenchments. The work I do is nearly all mechanical, and it has occurred to them that a sharp schoolboy would serve their purpose as well, and cost less than a third what I do."

"Owen—we shall starve! You should have been more careful."

He looked at her appealingly. Owen Tudor had one of those rarely sensitive natures to whom an unkind word from one they love, is keen pain.

"No care would have made any difference, mother. I did my best, Heaven knows."

"Of course you did," cried Ethel, warmly.

"Owen, it isn't your fault a bit."

"And you are so clever," put in Doris, "you are sure to get something else."

Owen shook his head.

"It will be harder work than you think, I'm afraid, dear, but I shall do my best. The manager gave me a hint that if I found anything suitable, they would release me at once. I mean to begin reading up advertisements to-morrow."

"If only you had your rights," said Mrs. Montague, with a sigh, "you would never need to work again."

"Then I should be very sorry to have them," said Owen, who knew his mother referred to a very old grievance, namely, that the little property she had inherited from her father, and which ought to have descended to her only son, had almost all been squandered by Mr. Montague in reckless dissipation.

A week passed and Owen heard of nothing likely to suit him; he began to feel thankful his mother knew the worst. If he had kept his secret the anticipation of the task of telling her would have been a daily nightmare. He was reading the papers in one of the Free Libraries during his dinner hour, when, in refofolding the *Morning Post*, his eye fell, by chance on a part he never looked at as a rule, the Agony Column, and the sight of his own name attracted his attention.

"Edmund Tudor. Wanted, the heir-at-law of Edmund Tudor, sometime of Diamond End, Northshire, and last heard of in London forty years ago. Fifty pounds reward will be paid to anyone giving the name and address of the before-mentioned Edmund Tudor's next of kin, and all persons related to him are earnestly requested to communicate with the undersigned."

"VESSEY AND VESSEY, Pump Court, Temple."

As in a dream, Owen's thoughts went back to his early childish days. He was only three years old when his father died, and had not the slightest recollection of him, but in the first home he could recall had been a water-colour painting of an old mansion standing in picturesque grounds, and beneath it the two words "Diamond End." Taxing his recollection still further, he recalled his mother saying the picture had been painted by her father-in-law from memory. During the Montague dispensation debts accumulated, and the last of Owen's first home was a man in possession and a forced sale of furniture and effects, when he was about nine. From that day to this he had never heard the name of Diamond End; was it possible the old man who painted it was the Edmund Tudor of the advertisement?

The thought gave a fresh interest to his home-going; his mother would be sure to remember the picture and the similarity of name would strike her, so Owen purchased a copy of the *Morning Post*, cut out the advertisement, and after tea, when Mrs. Montague made her stereotyped remark she "supposed he had not heard of anything," he answered quite cheerfully,—

"Well, mother, that depends on you, if your memory can recall our family history I rather fancy we may earn fifty pounds. Just listen to this."

Mrs. Montague listened with great interest, so did the three girls. When Owen finished there was a blank silence, the little pucker on his mother's forehead seemed to say she was lost in thought.

"There was a picture in the old house at Croydon," said Owen, slowly. "I can shut my eyes and see it now, that picture was called 'Diamond End,' and I believe you once told me my grandfather painted it."

"He did," said the widow at last, "and his name was Edmund; he died long before I saw your father. He left that picture to his sons to show them what kind of a home he had lost by his folly; he belonged to some great family but he was dreadfully wild and so he was disinherited."

"And my father was his only son?"

"Not his only one," corrected Mrs. Montague, "John had an elder brother but he died a few years after we were married. Owen, it seems too wonderful to believe but it looks to me as if you really were the person these lawyers were advertising for."

"How can we prove it?" asked the young man, thoughtfully.

Mrs. Montague opened a large, old-fashioned desk, and after a long search produced two papers, stained yellow by age, and put them into her son's hand. One was the certificate of a marriage between John Tudor, gentleman and Helen Brown, the bridegroom's father being described as Edmund Tudor gentleman; the second recorded the baptism of Owen Tudor, son of Helen and John Tudor.

"It would be easy to verify these," said Mrs. Montague, slowly. "You see I was married at Old St. Pancras Church and you were christened there, your father also. I don't know the reason, but he insisted on your being taken there; perhaps he had a faint hope good luck might come to you and wanted to have the proofs of your identity as plain as he could."

"I think I had better write to Mr. Vessey to-night."

Mrs. Montague shook her head.

"Take your dinner-hour early and go and see him, that will be better than a dozen letters, only you are so easily imposed on you will never stand up for your rights."

"If you turn out a rich man, Owen, won't it be just like a fairy tale?" demanded Arlene. "Fancy a poor city clerk becoming a country squire! Diamond End sounds charming."

"He'd be too grand for us then," said Mrs. Montague, spitefully. She had been thinking regretfully that she and the girls could claim no share in the Tudor property, and the regret made her cross "but then I daresay it'll all turn out a myth, and Owen will be nothing but a poverty-stricken clerk out of work."

As the clerks took their dinner-hour in parties, from twelve till three, Owen had very little difficulty in being one of the first detachment. Feeding time was precious and all too short for all he had to accomplish in sixty minutes; he took a cab and so very soon reached Mr. Vessey's office, he sent in his card with the result that he was promptly shown into the lawyer's private room.

Mr. Vessey glanced at the young man sharply; he had been so warmly attached to the late owner of Diamond End that he had something more than an ordinary interest in his possible successor. His survey of Owen's face satisfied him; the refined manner, the clear, expressive features all told favourably. Mr. Vessey decided he would far rather see this stranger master of Diamond End than Maurice Douglas.

"Have you come for yourself," he asked, gravely, "or for your father?"

"My father has been dead more than twenty years; these papers will show you that I am the grandson of an Edmund Tudor, but whether of the one you are inquiring for I can't say."

Mr. Vessey perused the certificates attentively.

"All that we know of Edmund Tudor is that he married an Italian flower-girl, forged his father's name for a good round sum and joined with that father to cut off the entail on condition of not being prosecuted."

Owen did not much relish this account of his ancestor.

"I have always heard my grandfather was a drawing master, he certainly had some skill as an artist for a picture of his hung in my nursery as a child. I can remember wondering at the name 'Diamond End.'"

"Have you that picture now?"

The sensitive face flushed painfully.

"My mother's second husband was always in difficulties, and all the furniture in the house I speak of was sold when I was nine years old."

"And your mother can throw no light upon the matter?"

"None, only from my father insisting on being married at St. Pancras Church, and later on desiring I should be christened there, she has a vague idea he wished to leave a complete chain of evidence as to my identity."

Mr. Vessey nodded.

"To be quite frank with you, Mr. Tudor, I have examined the registrar of the church in question. There is only one fact which throws doubt upon your claim. Edmund Tudor had two sons and your father was the younger."

"My uncle Henry died abroad. My mother remembers receiving the news of his death. She was in very great trouble at the time, and could not even afford to go into mourning."

"Well, Mr. Tudor," said the lawyer, kindly, "if you can prove that, I expect you will step into one of the finest properties in Northshire, and a clear ten thousand a year. Your great uncle, Richard Tudor, died last month, practically intestate, so everything will go to his next of kin."

In a very few words he told Owen Tudor of the double tragedy at Diamond End, but he avoided all mention of Gladys Keith and the terrible loss her uncle's death had caused her.

The interview had lasted over half an hour, Owen had only a brief ten minutes in which to get back to the City. Mr. Vessey smiled as he explained the reason for his haste.

"In a week's time, Mr. Tudor, I expect you will be independent of any clerkship. A few legal forms may have to be gone through, but to my mind, you have completely established your case."

How delighted the three girls were when they heard the news. They talked of nothing but Diamond End and Owen's luck. To his surprise his mother was unusually silent, and when he asked her if she had preserved the letter announcing Henry Tudor's death she returned, sarcastically, she had too much to do to keep letters for twenty years, she snapped at the girls for their bright expectations, and was altogether so irritable that it was a relief to her children when about nine o'clock she announced she had a headache and went to her own room.

So far from seeking sleep her conduct when safe in the privacy of her own apartment would have puzzled the little party downstairs.

Mrs. Montague opened the old desk from which she had taken the certificates last night, and pored carefully over its contents. At last she found what she sought, a letter written in a feminine hand on flimsy foreign paper. She read it through carefully, and then tore it into minute fragments.

"It is the only chance," she murmured to herself. "Nothing else will betray the secret. Owen is a good son on the whole and will do his duty to me and the girls—yes, it was the wisest step."

But, tiny as were the fragments, Mrs. Montague was not content. She placed them in the empty grate, struck a match, and set light to the little heap, watching with a white set face until it was reduced to ashes.

Helen Montague was not a bad woman, but to-night she had yielded to a terrible temptation. Only a few written words stood between her son and fortune. She had but to destroy a sheet of foreign writing paper, and Owen would be master of Diamond End, able to keep her in luxury and portion his sisters. She was not strong enough to resist temptation, and so the letter which had brought the news of her brother-in-law's death, and which (despite her denial to Owen) she had kept carefully for years was burnt to ashes.

And Mrs. Montague's bonfire changed the whole course of three lives!

(To be continued.)

A WOMAN'S TRIUMPH.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

URGED by the force of the fury which had possessed her so suddenly and so completely, Miriam ran almost the entire way back to the house.

It was not often she lost such entire control of herself, in her emotions; as a general rule, she usually kept a reserve of that cunning, that quiet wariness which was so much a part of her nature.

On one or two occasions, however, the burning heat of her rage, against either fate or an individual, had flamed up so strongly, so fiercely that it had swept aside even her caution and her cunning, and made of her, for the moment, an absolute madwoman.

So it was with her now.

At first frightened and taken by surprise, she had cudgelled her brains for some trustworthy prevarication to give to Settefeld.

She was very clever in her lying as a rule, and never spoke without much care and thought; she was bold nevertheless, and her boldness had carried her over many an awkward moment.

But neither boldness nor cleverness in falsehood had availed against Settefeld's knowledge of her wrongdoing.

Miriam had (as has been described), from the first been conscious of this man's rigid sense of honour, and had been afraid of him in consequence; his honour, his straightforward dealing was so difficult for her to work against.

She had, of course, never imagined such a crisis as had arrived this day; she had imagined her self secure, except from small possibilities, and these possibilities she had always determined she could meet and overcome.

Even when she had experienced that first blow, when she had suddenly become aware that Patricia had been brought into direct contact with Jane Butler, her courage and determination had not failed Miriam.

Nothing had really quite shaken her confidence in her own powers—not even the one horrible moment of fear yesterday when her eyes had rested upon Richard Butler's ashen face, and she had realised that this man who could be her ruin, was actually in the employ of her husband. No, even this Miriam had got over.

It had been an awful blow; but her brain had at once seen the loopholes of escape from danger. She had reckoned confidently on his death.

Her mind had, it is true, suggested a possibility of Patricia learning something of the truth, but from Patricia she feared nothing.

To save her brother from learning anything, Patricia would be capable of dying first—Miriam had never feared exposure through Patricia—and somehow she felt sure that if Butler were to recover consciousness before he died he would not betray her to anyone except to Patricia.

It was one of Miriam's gifts that she could divine almost exactly what line of action people would take.

She had never deceived herself about Settefeild.

"If ever he should know!" how often the thought had crossed her mind making her wince with fear and turn pale—

She had whispered to herself in these moments she must be prepared for no mercy from such a man as Settefeild.

"He would kill me!" she had said to herself once, and she had grown faint and cold from head to foot.

Now, the worst had happened, the truth was told, and urged by a perfect frenzy of rage and fear, Miriam was rushing away from that silent figure under the trees, back to the grand, noble house over which she had reigned as queen.

Her fury slackened after a while; she had to think, to arrange, to plot.

What would he do to her? Would he openly disgrace her? Would he come back and before the assembled household denounce her and turn her from his doors?

She shook aside such a thought even as it was born.

Was Settefeild built of such vulgar, common stuff as this?

Would he devise no quieter method of avenging his betrayed trust and the honour of his heart and name?

Miriam's run slackened into a walk. She felt tired and hunted.

She had never been in such a terrible moment. Even that hour in Russia (when the truth of Cyril Lindsey's position had come upon her with overwhelming force) had not been so terrible as this. For in that hour she had had the joy the satisfaction of revenge, power to act to strike had been left in her hands. It was she who dealt punishment, not she who was to receive it.

Now there was a punishment to come to her. What would it be—of what nature—how soon? When would she know the worst? She cast furtive glances behind her as she dropped into a slow walk.

There was now no sign to be seen of that tall figure standing so silent, so full of dignity. Would he hurt her?

Miriam shivered. Terrified as she was, she felt she would have given all she possessed to know what fate lay in store for her.

She tried to conjure up the possibilities. The remembrance of his face so changed, so stern, so shadowed with horror, sent a chill pang of fear to her miserable heart.

What mercy would such a man give to her, what hope was there for her future?

She would have to leave Belton, leave her new and proud position. She would have to go out into the world a woman with a black stain upon her, a social pariah.

Her story—that story of her folly and avarice,—that story of her woman's brutal cruelty and revenge.

The after story of her falseness and deception would be given to all to be repeated and repeated till it had spread everywhere.

She had so many enemies. Among all the hundreds she knew she could not really count on a single friend beyond her aunt and her family circle.

A sullen anger began to smoulder in her breast. Public depreciation, public humiliation was the one punishment (apart from physical violence) which hurt Miriam most to imagine. She soon dismissed the idea of his doing her any bodily harm.

"He is not a coward," she said to herself in a dull sort of way.

Somehow the value, the nobility, the beauty of his proud, honourable nature came home to her in this moment with a potency that carried conviction.

As she realised in this moment the true worth of the man she had married, so she realised in a dim far off way something of the anguish he must be suffering now; and then there came a touch of Miriam's old self.

"And he will know that Patricia has been right all the time," she said to herself between her teeth.

She cursed Patricia quietly and fiercely in this moment.

It was Patricia who was the real cause of the disaster; but for Patricia there could have been no possibility of Butler having been brought into her life again.

Patricia was her evil destiny. She had always suffered through Patricia, and now, now ruin and loss of all she prized most would lie at Patricia's door also.

"Oh! if I could make her suffer—suffer till she is ready to die!" Miriam said to herself.

The malignant hate for Patricia was not to be measured; it ran like molten fire in her veins, it made her chilled heart beat almost like a mad thing.

She had reached the house again by this time. Though she knew not what immediate fate was in store for her, she determined she would give no sign of anything unusual having happened to her.

The remembrance of Settefeild's great deep pride was a source of relief to her in this moment. She did not hope to escape punishment altogether, that was impossible, she said to herself; but as she reentered the house and made her way up to her boudoir she gave a shrug of her shoulders. She was now grown almost entirely into her old self.

"It will not be public, whatever it may be," she said to herself confidently. She walked up the stairs in her usual manner. Several servants met her and drew back respectfully as she came.

Lady Settefeild's beauty was universally admired by her household, and though she never gave herself the least trouble to be kind or sympathetic about these humble folk, she was exceedingly popular.

In fact it was only with the very few who had reason to doubt her nature that Miriam was not as warmly liked as she was most certainly warmly admired.

As she passed Lady Patricia's room she opened the door and glanced in.

It was empty. Maxton was not to be seen. Lady Settefeild immediately guessed the truth that the maid had gone off to the keeper's cottage to bring her young mistress home.

Miriam walked on leisurely and gracefully to her own room.

Her face had lost its pallor and its drawn lines of fear. It would have been impossible for anyone looking at her to imagine this was the face of a woman who had just passed through the most awful mental experience, and that even now her fate hung in the balance.

Miriam, however, having regained her old command of herself, was just a little more reliant, more shrewd, and harder than she had ever been before.

sort of cold, quiet rebellion had come in the

place of her fury. She armed herself with this feeling, she was fully resolved that in whatever war might be before her, she would give as many wounds as she received.

The knowledge of how much he had loved her, gave her intense satisfaction, not from a point of vanity, as it would have done ordinarily speaking, but because she could find means to make him suffer for everything he did to her.

When she was in her own room she sat down by the fire and waited.

"Will he come soon," she thought to herself. Her chief feeling was one of impatience against any suspense.

She talked to her maid negligently, and when Barbara came rushing in in her customary whirlwind fashion, Miriam received her just as usual.

"Thorold is going to take me for a ride; we are going ever so far. I wish Lady Patricia would come too, but, of course, she is not strong enough!" The young girl said this last with real regret. "You know she looked awfully ill and white when she went to bed last night, Mimi. I think you hurt her too." Babs was nothing if not straightforward. "Why did you come and take Thorold away as you did? It was really very rude of you, Mimi."

Miriam laughed; the thought that she had perhaps, given Patricia one little sting, was a pleasure to her.

"Since when have you set yourself up as a judge of manners, Mademoiselle Barbara, may I ask?" she demanded in an amused tone.

"I don't set myself up for anything, I only know what is right and what is wrong," Babs answered.

"And I was wrong?" Miriam queried lightly. Babs answered most emphatically.

"Of course you were! Why Lady Patricia and Thorold were sitting together, they were quite happy, and you came up all at once and took him away, because you said he looked dull! I call that very rude, though I am not grown up!"

Miriam was not in the least annoyed. Babs's words had set her thoughts on the track of finding a revenge on Patricia for all that had been wrought through and by her. She set her teeth as she conjured up a future of mortification and pain for the girl she hated.

"Whatever comes to me, I shall be able to work this. Thorold, of course, tries to impress me with the fact that he is changed to me, and that he is no longer to be moved by me; that remains to be proved. At least, I will bring Patricia into the dust through him. Oh, Heaven, but I will make her pride suffer and the pain eat out her heart!"

"What are you thinking about, Mimi?" Babs inquired, in amazement, coming back from her daily journey of admiration round her sister's lovely apartment, and catching a glimpse of Miriam's face, hard-set and unsmiling in this moment. "You look awfully cross; has something happened? What is the matter?"

Miriam got up, pinched her sister's ear, and laughed.

"How many more questions, all at once? Go and see if you can find Danvers—I want him. He will be in the library, I expect."

Babs rushed away at once, and Miriam stood looking after her.

The thought of giving some big, deep hurt to Patricia had brought her a rush of hot, savage joy; but after a moment her impatience returned.

"If he does not come soon I shall go and find him again. I must know the worst as soon as possible."

When Babs came running back with the unneeded information that Lord Settefeild was not in the library, Miriam went downstairs.

Thorold was standing in the hall already attired for riding.

He greeted Miriam with the same frank courtesy he had shown her each time he had met her, his manner was absolutely easy. He never changed colour, or seemed in the least distressed even when, as in this moment, Miriam let her little hand linger in his longer than was really necessary.

"I am waiting for you, Babs!" Thorold had

called to the girl as soon as he caught sight of her. "Have you had your breakfast?"

"Breakfast!" Babs cried indignantly, as she turned to bolt up the stairs again. "Why, of course, hours ago! What a question!"

Thorold laughed, and just glanced at Miriam.

"Babs is so thorough," he said, "I love the very sound of her voice, it would be simply impossible for her to tell anything but the actual truth."

Miriam assented with a smile on her beautiful face. But she did not intend to discuss Babs. She came and stood by the fire, and she looked at Thorold's big, stalwart figure.

A little while ago she had called him a clumsy, awkward creature; now, apart from any other feeling, a sort of admiration mingled in with that reliance that Thorold had inspired in her from the very first.

She was conscious of a gleam of stronger vanity and satisfaction than had come to her even in the beginning when she had won him so easily. He was, after all, a conquest to be proud of. His talents and his success were not without their value with Miriam, but these were not the strongest of the attractions she found in him to-day.

It was the man himself she admired, his strength, his fidelity that she desired. He had been hers so absolutely, so entirely, why should he not be hers still?

With her fate trembling in the balance, with a future that must be, no matter with what gentleness she was treated, a very—very different thing to what it had shaped to be only a few hours ago, would she not be wise at least in providing herself with a friend who would be indeed a friend, and more than that—a protector, a champion?

This was a dominant thought, but the memory of Patricia and of the dawning understanding and sympathy between Pat and Thorold was a much stronger impulse—an impulse that almost overpowered the fear and dogged defiance that filled Miriam's heart during this hour of suspense.

"Yes; as Dolly puts it there is very little subtlety about Babs," she said, and then she sighed softly.

Thorold had moved on one side to make room for her by the fire, at her sigh he glanced at her quickly and pushed forward a big chair.

"Won't you sit down, Lady Settefeild?" he said hurriedly, with his voice full of thought.

Miriam was looking a little paler than usual, and, despite all her defiance and her revengeful sullen courage it was impossible not to see now that her face was in repose, that she was either ill mentally or physically.

"Won't you sit down?" Thorold said.

He had conquered that mad, brief fever, but there was no coldness in his nature.

After a period of sharp suffering he had arrived at a conclusion, he had summed up Miriam as a thoughtless, beautiful child who had not been able to understand the meaning of his love, who had encouraged him without realising the extent of her power and his ultimate suffering.

He had grown accustomed to think of her in this light, and thus he had divested his mind of the faintest harshness towards her, or of the bitterness which had come naturally to him at the very first.

In treating her so gently, however, she was of course quite depreciated in his eyes, a fact which Miriam could not possibly have conceived possible.

She took the chair and sank into it.

The dull, dark morning outside made the old hall seem in shadows as in twilight. The fire burned and glowed upon Miriam's beauty. She sat silent a moment and then she looked across at him.

"This reminds me of the first time we met, Thorold," she said in the softest voice, and a sigh escaped her again.

Thorold assented quite easily.

"Only this is the morning," he said, briskly, "though I must say it does not look very like it."

Miriam moved impatiently. His calm matter-of-fact bearing was very bitter to her.

"Do you ever think of that evening, Thorold?"

she asked, in a low, hurried voice, after a little pause.

Thorold paused also before answering.

"I do not think that I do, Lady Settefeild," he said; his brows met in a frown.

It was all very well to forgive Miriam for her past conduct, but he had no intention or desire to experience it a second time.

"I have not much time for thought. I am always so busy," he added, in the same brisk, cheery fashion.

Miriam bit her lip sharply.

"Ah!" she said, bitterly. "You are indeed to be envied. How easy life is made for you men. You have the world before you to work, ambition and success to deaden pain and help you to forget, while we poor women!" she flung out her hands in an expressive gesture to finish her sentence. The gesture was far more eloquent than words.

Thorold was not only surprised and uncomfortable, he was annoyed too.

Something, he supposed, had gone wrong with one of her many toys; she had lost a jewel or her dressmaker had disappointed her—he had not a very lofty idea of Miriam's mental construction—and this was why she was indulging in these flights of fancy.

"I agree with you that in the broader side of life with its work and its troubles men have more to do; but I hold very strong views on the duties that should fall into every woman's hands, Lady Settefeild," he said, and he spoke gravely now. "I admire a true woman's nature as much as I admire the sun in the heavens or the depth and beauty of the ever-changing sea. There is nothing more beautiful than a sweet and good woman, when she is a *real* woman—not one of these *fin de siècle* creatures who would usurp the place and claim an equality with men. Women can do so much," Thorold added gently, "their work is infinite, their power illimitable."

Miriam clenched her hands.

Her mood was not one to receive a sermon at any time, but now when every fibre of her being was throbbing with a boldness that was built up of fear—now, when she stood on the very brink of an abyss, and might be pushed into it at any moment, a rebuke simply maddened her.

She cast softness, prudence to the winds.

"Thorold," she said, with a sort of cold fierceness, "you wilfully choose to misunderstand me. I know all that a woman can do, all that a woman can suffer, for I have experienced both. You tell me you choose to forget the past, to forget moments that are golden where all is black. Well, if you forget, I do not! Cast back your memory to that first night we met, recall to yourself a certain strange sentence I used—ah! I see by your face that you have not forgotten—that you—"

She stretched out her hand and touched his; then her fingers closed over his hand.

"Oh! my dear," she said, in broken kind of way,—"Oh! my dear, if you could know how often I have remembered, how I have suffered. You have thought me cold, selfish, cruel, heartless; how little you have known, how little you have understood. My treatment of you was cruel, had it been my own free act, you would have the right to call me by every harsh word you can use, and you have thought it my act; do you think I have not seen this, that I have not winced at the condemnation of your thoughts? Ah! Thorold, if you had only known, if you could only know, now."

The man beside her stood looking down at her.

His love for her was gone, but her grief moved him, and there was the potent magnetism of her beauty that thrilled him even against himself.

All had come upon him so suddenly. Her words were wild ones, yet there seemed to run an element of truth in them!

Her suggestion that she had not been a free agent! Her recalling to him those words she had spoken the first time they had met, that strange expression of hatred for Lord Settefeild that had never been fully explained—all seemed touched with sincerity, even though to imagine a deep shadow where all had been so

was a hard task for a practical mind like Thorold's.

He spoke to her very gently and with tender calmness, he did all he could to soothe.

"Please forget the past," he said earnestly, "believe me, I have no harsh thoughts for you. I was a fool that was all, and being a fool I had to suffer punishment for my folly; I entreat you not to think of it again. I am your friend. I desire to be your friend always, and you—"

Miriam drew her hand away from him, her face was averted, she turned sharply away.

"Ah! Thorold," she sighed faintly, "I—I am more than your friend: alas! that it should be so!"

She had fluttered away from him as she said this, and Thorold remained gazing after her, a very tumult of emotion crowding his heart, out of which a great pity for Miriam rose most prominently, and yet even in this most surprising and bewildering moment a touch of honest contempt mingled with the pity.

Even if all she had endeavoured to suggest were true, and that behind the brilliant picture of her life there lurked a skeleton, had she been true to her womanhood she would have died, so he said to himself, rather than have confessed this to him out of all the world!

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE day wore away slowly.

The hours to Miriam passed like so many centuries.

She tried in vain to occupy herself, she could settle to nothing.

Thorold and Babs went out for a tremendous ride.

"We shall not be home till quite late," Babs announced to her aunt, Miss Stapleton, and to her sister, Dolly. "Thorold is going to give me some lunch."

"Thorold is too good to you," Dolly said, laughing.

Each hour that went by seemed to give Dolly courage to bury her lost dream utterly out of sight, and by degrees out of memory too. There was the heartiest good fellowship between Thorold and Dorothy Stapleton.

The girl had a passing fancy that the young man looked grave and troubled as she went out to see the riders mount and depart, but she little knew the real nature of the trouble that burdened Thorold.

As he rode away beside Babs' trim little figure, well seated in her saddle as her father's daughter could not fail to be, Thorold told himself there must be no doubt about his immediate movements.

He must leave Belton without delay, he must never again permit himself to be in such close quarters with Miriam.

He had been touched by her words at first, but the more he reflected the more disagreeable the reflection was.

The image of Patricia's grave thoughtful face with its dark beautiful eyes rose before him every now and then as though to blot out and hide away the picture of Miriam's dishevelled loveliness.

Thorold had a pang at his heart as he contrasted these two women in his thoughts.

He seemed to read now behind the veil, and to know the true meaning of Patricia's grief over her brother's marriage.

He had a wave of hot shame himself in remembering that he had been even unwillingly, the recipient of a confession which no good, pure-minded woman would ever have made, no matter how terrible the temptation or how overwhelming the greatness of her misery.

To connect the thought of unhappiness with the life which he had seen since he had come down to Belton was simply an impossibility.

Whilst not desiring to judge any person harshly, Thorold's strong sense of justice and right rose up against Miriam's exhibition of grief, and against her more than foolish words.

He had been drawn to Settefeild from the first,

and since he had been a guest at Belton Towers, he had had more than ample opportunity for seeing and knowing the intellectual powers and the real character of the man Miriam had married.

How was it possible to reconcile the vague yet painful suggestions she had given him in her agitated words, with the nature of a man whom all the world respected, and whom Thorold admired with all the sincerity of which he was capable?

The hot blood mounted to the young man's face as he remembered everything that Miriam had said, and against every principle of his nature he found himself dealing out to her a strong measure of contempt and reproach.

Had there been a lingering trace of his old romance for her, this morning's work would have completely dispelled it; as it was, the man recognized now more than ever the folly of his past dream, and as he did so he had a pang at his heart for the man who called this woman wife, and who worshipped her so fervently and so unwisely.

A good gallop with Babs through the chilly morning air did much to dispel Thorold's discomfort; though he was not shaken in his determination to leave Belton as soon as possible. If he could manage to go without seeing Miriam again it was what he would have liked, but this would not be quite feasible, for Miriam was his hostess, and it must be to her he would have to make his excuses for shortening his visit so abruptly.

It cost him a great deal to have to go away from his chance of seeing Patricia, of speaking with her, of drawing hope and sweetness from her sympathetic presence.

Chance to meet her was so rare with him, and the joy of being with her was doubly great now that he was about to take himself away.

"If only my mother had been with me," he said to himself wistfully as he listened vaguely to Babs' merry chatter. It was a favourite dream with him to conjure up in his imagination the friendship that might and would—of this he was sure—have existed between his mother and Patricia had the former been still alive. He had spoken to Patricia very often of his mother, and his words had been so simple, and yet so vivid, that Patricia had grown to know the picture of the pale suffering woman as well as if she had really met her in truth and in deed.

Yes, he must go away from Patricia, and he sighed as he realized this, and as he sighed he prayed earnestly that the knowledge of Miriam's true nature might never be revealed to this proud pure girl, for he was assured Patricia would never break her heart if she could realize how worthless was the spirit that lived within Miriam's beautiful form.

This prayer, all earnest as it was, was not destined to be granted as we know, for even at this very hour Patricia alone, up in the neat, humble bedroom of the keeper's little house was sitting, stricken to the heart with the weight of the horrible story that had been given to her by the lips of the man who was now cold and dead. The hours passed and Patricia could not move.

Maxton had come down to the cottage, and had at first coaxed and scolded, but there was a look in her young mistress's face which silenced her altogether, and brought the tears to her eyes.

"You'll tell me when you are ready to go, my dear," the good-hearted woman murmured as she went away and shut the door.

"Ready to go?"—Patricia shuddered.

To go back to Belton to meet that lovely laughing lie; to go back and meet her beloved, betrayed brother; to go back and take her old place with her heart crushed by the knowledge of Miriam's miserable treachery, by the knowledge of her falseness to the dead and to the living; to have to go back and take up the thread of daily life watching the tender light gleam in her brother's eyes for the wife he adored, for the woman whose whole life had been one big and awful lie since she had crossed his path.

Go back! how could she go? how undertake the task that lay before her; how draw breath under the same roof with the false, soulless creature who reigned as queen over her brother's home and heart?

Patricia sat like one turned to stone. The morning sped away; she was heedless of the hours. The natural fear that must have seized her under ordinary circumstances, for the painful death of which she had been so close a witness was swallowed up in the horror of the story she had heard.

It was the deceit, the cruelty, the wanton disregard of all womanliness that appalled her most.

She had thought Miriam unworthy of her brother's great deep love, but she had never and could never have imagined the girl's back life to have held so dark a page as this. In all the days of her suffering, and they had been many, Patricia had never imagined it possible she could know such mental trouble as burdened her now.

She was tortured by her love for her brother, her desire to keep all from him, and by her repugnance to even the thought of Miriam.

For Danvers there was nothing she would not do to save him from the horrible heart destruction that must come with this story. She was capable of any sacrifice of her own feelings, but she must have time, she must call up all her strength, and finally she must realize that this trouble was not one of the moment, but must endure for years and years until the grave had closed over Miriam or over the man she had so wronged, and whom she had married despite every obstacle that should have prevented her.

The day passed away.

Maxton came up twice bringing beef tea which Patricia swallowed mechanically. She had need of all her strength, so she did not refuse her faithful maid's ministrations.

And at last as the afternoon was drawing in Patricia rose and let Maxton draw her heavy cloak over her shoulders.

"You'll speak a word to Mrs. Smithson, my lady, as you go down won't you? She's that troubled about you and Smithson too; they seem to think his lordship is angry with them for having asked you to come to-day, my lady."

"I will speak to them," Patricia said, in a voice from which all sound of hope, of music, seemed gone for ever. "Poor things, they must not think this—they have been so good—so good!"

She went slowly down the steep, narrow stairs, and found Smithson and his wife waiting for her. They were in great distress about her, but Patricia spoke to them in her gentlest way.

"You must not think Lord Setefield is angry with you. I am sure he will not be. I will explain," she said.

"His lordship seemed to be angry, my lady, when he came in this morning!" Smithson answered. He had opened the door and stood back to let Patricia pass out.

The girl stood suddenly rooted to the spot.

"My—my brother was here this morning!" she said, and her tone was sharp as with fear or pain, "when—when—what hour?"

"It were quite early my lady—just about the time as that poor man were dying—he must have been in the house, but you did not know. I found him coming out through the kitchen when I got back from the village. He said he had called to speak with me about the shooting ground. I told him your ladyship was here, but he would not disturb you, my lady, and then he asked me for one of his guns as I've had here ever since Christmas, pretty near. We were going to have a little practice with the clay pigeons, my lady, and—"

But Patricia had heard no more.

With a gasping cry she had stretched out both her hands to the empty air.

"Oh, Heaven be merciful—my brother—my dear brother—let me see him once again. Let me—"

The strong arms of the keeper were round about the girl's senseless form and she was carried back and laid tenderly on the couch in the little parlour.

In the consternation and sorrow about their young lady's illness, none of the three humble people who hovered about her caught the meaning of her anguished whisper.

They only thought that the shock to her

nerves had been even more severe than they had imagined, little guessing that the sister's love had pierced through the mystery and lighted on the truth!

(To be continued.)

THE SQUIRE'S SON.

—30—

CHAPTER XLII.

By noon the next day the guests had deserted the Hall, and in his own room sat Captain Dartmouth, leaning back in his easy-chair, buried in a fit of reverie and meditation, his dark cunning eyes fixed with a stern, absorbed gaze upon the Turkey carpet going over again in his mind the scene of last night; recalling every word of the strange story, every look and gesture of the beautiful woman who told it.

The door opened and the secretary entered.

A letter was in his hand, he had come to ask a question relative to the answer.

His master took it carelessly and explained, then asked,—

"What progress did you make with your inquiries?"

"None," said the secretary, without raising his spectacles from the letter in his hand. "The path is difficult, the road to it even is lost."

"You have learnt nothing?" asked the captain, fixing his penetrating eyes upon the youth's face.

"As yet nothing," was the reply.

"Good," said his master, with a look of relief.

"During your absence I have discovered enough of the matter to make farther inquiries unnecessary. You will lay down the task."

"Certainly."

"I shall go up to town in two hours from this, you will remain to see that this place is put in order—the strong rooms closed, and that sort of thing, and follow me to-morrow."

"Very good, sir," was the hasty reply. "Have you any other commands?"

"No—stay. What brought you on the terrace so late last night?"

"I had arrived from town too late to admit of my entrance by the hall without awakening the porter, and was making my way by the shrubbery to my room."

"Ah," said the captain. "Did you recognise the lady with whom I was talking?"

"Your face and hers were in shadow," replied John Stanfield, with impassive respect.

The captain, accepted the answer as a negative to his question, nodded curtly a dismissal, and the secretary noiselessly withdrew.

On his way he met the serpent-like valet, Vignes, who had been summoned to prepare for his master's immediate departure.

Two hours later the lord and master of Dale started from his place in the country to his other palace in town, and the new Hall seemed still and deserted indeed, for the crowd of servants had gone up before or with him, and only the housekeeper and John Stanfield the secretary remained.

No sooner was the departure over, than the quiet figure of the latter watching from the window suddenly underwent a transformation.

As if freed from a spell it lost its bent and weird look, and with a cry of relief threw up its arms towards heaven, straightened its back and removing the dark spectacles that hid the beautiful eyes exclaimed, in a voice strangely different from the husky one that had spoken a few hours before,—

"And now until to-morrow I am free, free to dig deeper into the mystery, free to search farther and work harder for you, dear, dear Laury. Oh, I think I should go mad, nay I am sure I should, beneath all this load of mystification and crime if it were not that I know it all tends to wrong him—him who risked his life twice, nay thrice, for me and taught me to love. Oh, Hugh! oh, Laury! how I long to see you. I know—my heart tells me—you will keep your promise. I have searched the paper every day and never seen that magic

line, but I would stake my whole life upon your word; and you promised me, good fortune or ill, to return to England in a year and a day after our parting.

"Can I hope, dare I pray, that when we meet I may lay at your dear feet the inheritance this villain has robbed you of? There, there, let me be quiet John Stanfield again, if I am going to lose my presence of mind in this way. Let me think what he would do if placed in my position. Good, brave, wise Laury would work, act, not sit down and give way like this. If there is anything to be discovered it is upstairs, I will go and have another search."

So saying the secretary replaced his spectacles, and resuming the old attitude of careworn and abstracted taciturnity traversed the corridors and made his way to the old, neglected lumber rooms above.

The dust had gathered again upon the places from which he had unconsciously removed it during the night he had been listening to the Vitzarelli's conversation. He noticed this with a feeling of relief, for the old deserted room seemed sacred to him, judging by the way in which he paused at every turn and tenderly touched the articles within it.

He was suddenly startled by the sound of voices which seemed to proceed from beneath the window; jumping noiselessly from the chair, the youth stole to the casement and cautiously looked down. But the old masonry projecting over the lower windows prevented him from seeing anything immediately below him, and after waiting until the voices had spoken again, he left the room, and, running lightly down the silent and deserted stairs, made his way round to the back and concealing himself behind the laurels, peered out.

Scarcely had he done so than two figures—a woman and a man—made their way cautiously to within a half-dozen yards of the spot where he lay hidden, and the lady, who was dressed in black, said, tremulously, pointing to a clump of trees and shrubs,—

"That is the spot. Look carefully and you will see even from here traces of the old masonry."

The gentleman followed the direction of her finger with his eyes, and then turned and looked towards the terrace.

The unseen watcher almost uttered a cry of astonishment as the lady turned and disclosed her features.

The two were Rebecca Goodman and Sir Charles Anderson!

The one at feud with Reginald Dartmouth, and so the least likely person in the world to be within the boundary of his estate; the other his close friend, who was supposed by all to be at that moment on the road to London!

What was the meaning of it?

Hist! they are speaking again.

"Did you say he came from the terrace here and walked towards the old well?"

"Yes, I can swear it."

"And that you saw a folded paper within the bosom of his coat? And—what was that? Something moved amongst those shrubberies!"

"Let us go—I would not have come if you had not so persuaded me. Come, Charlie, you see the spot. For Heaven's sake do not let us be seen here."

Yielding to her entreaties, Sir Charles, who seemed fascinated by the spot and looked bewildered and troubled beyond description, took her hand upon his arm and both walked away.

But they had been seen and heard likewise, for almost before they were out of sight the slim figure pushed aside the laurels, and, looking after them with pale, startled face, murmured,—

"So there are others on the trail!"

CHAPTER XLII.

"COUNT, you do not congratulate me!"

The speaker was Reginald Dartmouth, the man addressed Count Vitzarelli.

The two gentlemen were seated in the smoking-room of Captain Dartmouth's town house, the captain smoking a strong Bengal cheroot, the

Italian twisting up a cigarette with thin, nervous fingers, and avoiding the dark eyes of his companion.

He had just been announced, and Captain Dartmouth after the usual greeting had put the remonstrance,—

"You do not congratulate me, my dear Count. Possibly the Countess has left the delightful task of communicating my unspeakable happiness to me!"

He spoke with that soft, subtle, half-sarcastic tone that always irritated the Italian, and kept his eyes still fixed upon his face as if enjoying his embarrassment.

"I—Lucille has spoken to me, but a few words only—"

"Enough to convince you that my confidence was not a vain one," put in the captain, silkily. "Yes, Count, I am indeed a happy man! Fortune has conferred on me her best and most glorious favour. I am, I may say, comfortably wealthy, and I have won the most beautiful woman in the world!"

"You have obtained her consent?" said the Count, half interrogatively.

"That is so," replied Reginald Dartmouth, with a smile. "Your niece, my dear Count, has consented to be my wife."

"Unreservedly!" asked the Count, with a slight flush.

"What condition should the Countess make?" retorted the captain, "save the acquiescence of her guardian, and I have that, as you will no doubt remember, my dear Count," and he nodded towards the bureau in which was locked the document the Count had signed.

"Yes, you have," said the Count, throwing off his gloom as if with an effort. "And I congratulate you, my dear Dartmouth. It would ill befit me to speak in praise of Lucille, but all that so near and dear a relation could say in her favour I would say. It is sudden—very sudden. I—I did not think you would gain her heart so quickly."

"Love at first sight," murmured the captain, with still latent sarcasm. "Ah, my dear Count, such passion as mine could not but awaken its like! But, as I see you did not come to congratulate me, let me hear the why and wherefore of your visit. Was it to smoke a cigarette with a little gossip, or have you any news?"

He spoke lightly, enjoying the troubled look upon the Italian's face.

He knew all the news the Count came to tell, and took a savage pleasure in assuming an easy, confident air, and thereby making the communication more difficult and unpleasant.

"News, ay, ill news," said the Count.

"Not bad news! Oh, Count, Count, I begin to despair of our cause!" said Reginald Dartmouth, with an assumption of despondency.

"Despair! who talks of despair!" said the Count, with a ghastly smile. "No, no; do not speak the word. We must win! We have right on our side," he added, frenziedly rising and pacing the room.

"But not the might it would seem, and that's the winning quality, my dear Count," retorted the other, with an undisguised sneer. "Right goes for little in these times, or in any other. Might is the thing, and I had hoped that by this time you had got it—if not my poor money has been thrown on very barren waters."

"Don't speak of money!" exclaimed the Count, passionately. "It is the want of money that has crippled us. Dartmouth, I must have some more. I came to-night for some. I must have it!"

Reginald Dartmouth's cunning eyes hid themselves behind their drooping lids and he remained silent, slowly shaking his head.

"What do you mean?" asked the Count, excitedly. "You cannot refuse! Remember our bond!" and he bit his cigarette in his intense excitement.

"Softly, my dear Count," remonstrated Reginald Dartmouth. "You are jumping to conclusions. I have not yet refused."

"You have not yet consented!" retorted the Count, fiercely. "Why do you remain silent? Why do you shake your head? I say I want the money you have agreed to give me for—"

"For your consent to your niece's marriage, eh, my dear Count?"

The Italian flushed.

"Put it how you like," he said. "I only ask my bond."

"And you shall have it, never fear. We Englishmen are shopkeepers, you know. We don't break our words, least of all our written engagements. But you must tell me how much you want, my dear Count."

"Twenty thousand pounds," replied the Italian conspirator, promptly.

"That is beyond the sum agreed—"

"How!" broke in the Count. "How? Did you not agree to give me fifty thousand?"

"No," replied Reginald Dartmouth, with a quiet smile. "I did not agree for that sum, but I don't refuse to lend it. I merely hinted that it was in excess of the amount set down. Twenty thousand pounds. And by what time do you require it?"

"To-night—to-night, this hour," said the Count, sinking into a chair opposite his tormentor and wiping the perspiration from his heated face which formed a well-defined contrast to the pale, calm one before him.

"To-night! It is impossible," said Reginald Dartmouth, quietly puffing a column of smoke high into the air and watching it with calm attention.

The Count turned white.

"Impossible, my dear Dartmouth! Do you know to what a pass we have come! We have been repulsed—beaten, threshed. Our men are lying in heaps, dead and wounded! All will be lost if we do not succour them."

"Sob," muttered the arch plotter, inaudibly. "The game is up indeed."

Then aloud,—

"I understand the emergency, my dear Count, but I say again impossible. I have not a thousand pounds in the house—nay, more, I have not that sum in the bank. You must remember that my money is almost entirely invested, and that what little I have free has been broken into pretty heavily by the late campaign at the Hall. Twenty thousand pounds! my dear Count, with as much reason you might demand twenty million."

The Count leant forward and fixed his dark gray eyes upon him.

"Do you say that you cannot—that you will not give me the money?"

"Certainly—that is, not to-night."

"When then?" asked the Count, retaining his unnatural calmness with a great effort.

"In six days," replied Reginald Dartmouth, quietly. "It would be impossible to get so large an amount in less time."

"In six days," mused the Count, with a heavy sigh. "You swear that?"

"Certainly, if you require such assurance," said Reginald Dartmouth, with a sneer. "And now, my dear Count, having disposed of business, let us to pleasure. You will take a little wine? Oh, come, no refusal I beg. We will have a quiet glass and a chat."

And as he spoke he rose softly and walked toward the room.

Halfway across the room, however, he stopped and listened intently.

The next moment he sprang toward the door, opened it, and to the Italian's amazement dragged the figure of a man into the room.

It was Vignes, the valet, white and trembling. Reginald Dartmouth held him at arm's length for a moment, piercing him through and through with sharp eyes. Then as the valet commenced a piteous wail said, with a stern, merciless accent,—

"You vile beast, you were listening. Not a word or I'll wring your tongue out. Count, see how we punish eavesdroppers in this country."

And with a cold-blooded smile he raised his long, lithe hand, and struck the white, snake-like face a fearful blow.

"Now get out of my sight, out of the house, and out of the world if you can, for if I meet you I'll repeat the dose."

The man got up from the ground, for the blow had felled him, and walked to the door.

There he turned his blood-stained face toward

the cruel one of his late master, and gave him one long, viperish look.

Then without a word he glided out, closing the door carefully and noiselessly behind him.

CHAPTER XLIII.

REGINALD DARTMOUTH had no sooner become convinced of the utter hopelessness of Count Vitzarelli's plans than he determined to avail himself of them to recover some of the many thousands he had advanced towards their accomplishment.

Unscrupulous to the uttermost he cared no more for honour than a thief cares for honesty. A stranger to fear, he entirely disregarded and scorned the penalty which the Secret Society exacted of treason.

He trusted to his clear, keen long-sightedness to carry him triumphantly through the dilemma, and made his plans.

Accordingly the morning after the Count's visit saw him exquisitely attired as usual. He went to the mansion in Grosvenor-square which the Vitzarellis occupied, and was ushered into the small drawing-room.

It was empty, but Reginald Dartmouth, with an air almost of proprietorship, dropped into a luxurious fauteuil, and stroking his silky moustache, connoised over the part he intended playing.

After a few minutes' waiting he heard the door open and rose to receive the Countess.

She looked very beautiful in her light morning robe of muslin, and her eyes lit up with a flash of seeming satisfaction and pleasure, while a thrill of delight ran through him at the remembrance that this beautiful woman was his.

Such a feeling a fowler might experience as he saw his snare close round a stately kingfisher—not love, but the delight of mere possession.

He bent over her hand and pressed his lips to its white smooth surface—he knew better than to offer a more familiar embrace—and in his musical voice said, by way of greeting,—

"Am I too early, Lucille? I could wait no longer."

She smiled, but the next moment her face looked calm and cold as usual.

"I am an early riser, Captain Dartmouth."

"Nay," he murmured, reproachfully. "Not Captain Dartmouth now surely, Lucille. I am Reginald to you or nothing."

"Reginald then," she said, in a voice that was utterly devoid of love, or the resemblance of it. "Reginald, if you like it better. It is a pretty name, though rather deep and grave to Italian ears."

"Change it to what you please," he said, eagerly, leading her to the sofa, and seating himself at her side, while he still retained her hand. "Change it to what you please, Lucille. I cannot but hate it if you dislike it. Change it. Change it; it is yours."

"No, not yet," she said, with a slight flush, quietly disengaging her hand as she spoke. "Not yet; there were—"

"Conditions, or rather a condition," he murmured, eagerly, filling up her pause. "I have not forgotten, Lucille. Would it be possible for me to forget? The condition was—"

He hesitated.

The Countess's face paled, and her hands knit together as in anguish at the effort of restraining some great emotion.

"Shall I repeat it?"

She inclined her head.

"That I discovered the villain who deceived your sister—nay, my sister, Lucille, for all who own your name are dear to me."

"Yes," she said, tremulously, keeping her eyes fixed upon the distant corners of the room.

"I have not forgotten the condition, Lucille. Indeed I came here this morning to ask you—nay, to implore you to release me from it."

She turned to him with a sudden gesture.

"Give up the hope of my life?" she said.

"No," he replied, eagerly. "But to refrain from setting it up as a barrier to our union."

"Lucille, since the night I heard your story," he continued, his voice wondrously soft and

pleading, "I have been unable to dismiss it from my mind. All other matters, important as some are, have given way before the intensity of it. I have scarcely slept at night. I have been in a dream all day, seeking some means of attaining your purpose. This morning I have come to implore you to cancel the condition that its fulfilment may be more thoroughly gained. You ask me, Lucille, to postpone our marriage until this nameless, unknown villain has been discovered and punished. I answer, that I am as eager as yourself to find him, but that the chances of success are really lessened by our separation. Let us as man and wife hunt out the destroyer of your sister. Singly we can do little, together we may—nay we must, succeed. Once married we will leave no stone unturned. We will trace the history of her life to its last days. We will search every capital and court of Europe. We will—oh, Lucille, we must succeed."

At the impassioned fervour of his voice her resolution wavered.

After all why should she remain firm? Why should she deny him?

He loved her, he was an honourable man. She had his promise delivered in so sweet a voice, and she had no cause to doubt his sincerity.

For the rest Lucille, Countess of Vitzarelli, cared but little.

What love she had to give was long since buried with the sister her mother had trusted to her. If she must marry, as well this handsome, powerful Englishman as another—nay, all things considered, much better.

With his keen eyes gleaming from beneath his drooping eyelids he read these thoughts as their outward signs flashed across her face, and, seizing the moment, whispered:

"Lucille, say yes. Your heart says it, I know, let your lips give it voice. You know I love you. You cannot doubt that I will be true to my promise. I swear not to rest until the mystery of her death has been cleared up and the cause of it punished!"

"You swear!" she said, hurriedly, almost breathlessly. "Ah! how can you realise the passionate thirst that devours me for revenge upon the unknown villain—how can you understand? Nay, you cannot. But you swear?"

"I swear!" he said, solemnly.

"Then I yield," she said, in a low voice.

He caught her hand and raised it to his lips, then venturing still farther drew her towards him and pressed a kiss upon her white brow.

Then ere she could regain her composure, he went on, softly:

"And now, Lucille, you will grant me still one other boon. Do not keep me in suspense too long. You have given me the right to claim you as my wife. Let me exercise it quickly."

She started and looked at him with half-frightened eyes.

(To be continued.)

THE SECRETS AND SHADOWS OF CASTLEGRANGE.

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CHAPTER XXV.

NEVER peradventure before on this planet have there been known two young women of our like rearing and position so absolutely free and chaperon-less in every respect as were Felicia Luck and I, at this time, at Castlegrange.

We did precisely as our own wills dictated; there was no one either to authorise or to question our actions.

We wandered, within the forest boundary or beyond it whithersoever we pleased; for excursions or errands upon wheels there was always a carriage with attendants at our command.

We sat on the brim of the old fountain in the grassy quadrangle, with its scaly writhed monster all moss-grown in the centre of the dusky deep lilled pool, so still, so melancholy of aspect, even on the fairest of days, and read novels, or talked of each other's past, sometimes recalling, not with-

out a quiet sort of pleasure, the lights and shadows of girlhood as we had known them with Madame Adolphe.

We explored the great old house from top lumber-room to nethermost cellar—that is, wherever our curiosity and intrepidity were not baffled, brought to a standstill, by an unyielding stout oak door well guarded by a vanished key.

With infinite wonder and delight we examined the countless treasures and things of interest which garnished the barons' hall; the ancient black cabinets; the tattered, smoke-dimmed banners; the clumsy mailed figures—those ghostly knights of the joust—the pictures, the china, the tapestried door-hangings, the deadly weapons of the battle-field and the chase.

And one day, when no soul save ourselves was within sight or hearing, we peeped at the lovely veiled picture of Doris and Doreen which hung there in the gallery near to the organ-loft.

Of course there was neither harm nor disobedience on our part in this proceeding; nevertheless I had all the while a vague uneasy sort of feeling that I should not have liked my cousin Julian to come upon us unawares and catch us there in the gallery in the act!

But Felicia's was a daring spirit; and hers being greatly the stronger of the two, oftentimes overruled mine—scattering my scruples to the winds and perhaps leading me into mischief.

She was a darling girl, the dearest and truest girl in the world, and I loved her! But it may be that, after all, Mrs. Vasper was correct in her judgment, and that poor Felicia was not altogether the best and wisest close companion and friend I could have fixed my girlish affections upon. But then have we not all of us our faults and our weaknesses—which of us indeed is perfect?

"Oh, Hebe!" she breathed, on that day in the gallery, as we stood together gazing surreptitiously upon the faithful presentment of the beautiful Tressillian twins which Julian kept guarded so jealously from the light and the dust of day—"Oh, Hebe," Felicia cried, "it is in truth a wonderful likeness! I mean, that which is discernible between you and them. And if that is Doreen with the yellow rose, why you, as you are looking this very day, at this very minute, Hebe, might have sat for the portrait yourself!"

"Yes," I sighed in reply, "I know it is very like; that I am very like it. Julian himself used always to say so long ago, I—I remember."

"If he said and thought so then, what I wonder is his opinion now!—now when you are exactly of the same age as was Doreen when that picture of her there was painted!" observed Felicia drily.

Involuntarily I checked another sigh. I knew well enough, or believed that I did, what was Julian Tressillian's opinion of the question; and why it was that he now showed himself so solicitous in daily avoiding me.

"I'll tell you what," cried Felicia suddenly; "I must try and have a peep soon, Hebe darling, into your ghostly old crypt under the chapel—yes, I must, dear—and what's more, I mean to! This exquisite picture has fired my curiosity anew, so to speak, and now I want to see those panelled coffins in the vault. We must manage it somehow, ducky. What do you say, eh?"

"Never, Felicia," I answered emphatically; "it cannot be done."

"Nonsense, my dear. 'In the bright lexicon of youth,' don't you know, 'there's no such word as fail,'" quoted Felicia carelessly.

"Please put all thought of such a thing quite out of your head, Felicia," I advised gravely. "Do believe me, Julian would never hear of it—would never sanction it."

"He need never hear of it, let us say," corrected Felicia Luck, significantly. And she laughed in a way that meant much.

But I shook my head resolutely.

"Utterly impossible, Felicia. Besides, I do not in the least know where the chapel keys are likely to be kept; even if ever supposing—"

"We must bide our time and find out," put in Felicia coolly. "My dear, do not you yet know that when I make up my mind to do a thing I generally in the end succeed in doing it?"

I smiled incredulously; Felicia nodded confidently; and the matter for the time being dropped.

I had no secrets from Felicia, just as she had none from me, and we had often before talked together of Doris and Doreen, and of the uncovered, flower-strewn, glass-panelled coffins resting side by side in the dark burial vault of Castlegrange.

Sunday Felicia called our day of wild excitement and dissipation; because on that day, in the morning, Mr. Christopherson, the slim pale curate from his adjoining parish of Lowbranch, altered in appearance not one jot since I had seen him last, as of yore came over to us to conduct divine service in the Castlegrange chapel.

Then it was, at luncheon or early dinner afterwards, that Felicia chattered and coquetted outrageously with the bashful young country clergyman, and made at him "wicked lightnings" with her eyes; by her "levity of conduct," her "unseemly demeanour," drawing many a stern impotent frown from the impassive countenance of Mrs. Vasper, and gratified blushes and simperings at the same time from Mr. Christopherson himself.

On Sunday evening, with Julian's consent, and Mrs. Vasper's mute disapproval—for were we not, according to her creed, openly violating the fourth commandment, and thereby setting a heinous example in Sabbath-breaking to our inferiors whose morals should be shaped by our own?—on Sunday evening, I say, Felicia and I invariably had out the carriage and in it drove off to the old parish church at Waybridge; there, I fancy, creating quite a stir amid the congregation by our appearance in the roomy Tressillian pew in the chancel.

My kinsman Julian was never seen within it nowadays; but the beautiful twin sisters, Doris and Doreen, had often sat together there, side by side, in that dim old pew, in the days that were gone.

The 13th of June, I well recollect, was a perfect summer Sabbath day—still and peaceful, with a holy calm breathing, as one might say, over all the quiet land; a Sunday, indeed, such as one is accustomed to in green secluded spots buried far away from cities in the heart of the country. The sound of church-bells came faintly and sweetly over the tranquil fields and meadows, in which the farm cattle lay chewing placidly, and above which the wild brown larks, invisible below, trilled endless peans, "running," as Shelley says, "in the sky;" the mighty forest trees just stirred and whispered as the caressing west wind, soft as the sigh of a maiden, went wandering through their sun-flecked foliage.

Every now and then the low wooing note of dove or wood-pigeon fell upon the warm silence in the distant rides, or perchance the screech of a kingly cock-pheasant, or the startled rush from her form amid the bracken of the timid hare.

Only a short distance from the forest lodge a stream went glancing and gurgling over its shallow stony bed; here alive and radiant with quivering shafts of sunlight; there subdued and sombre with patches of woodland shadow.

All nature seemed to know and to acknowledge that it was the seventh day, whereon the Creator had rested from his labours, hallowing it for all eternity.

At eventide the sun went down behind soft plum-coloured clouds fringed with Heaven's own gold, which, presently fading at sight of a bright lone star, appeared to melt and spread indistinguishably into one fair region of opalescent hues.

Our happiest ideas, and indeed our riskiest also, emanated as a rule from Felicia; seldom from me; and on that particular Sunday evening she said abruptly, as the carriage drove into the town and stopped at the churchyard gates,—

"Let us walk home for a change, Hebe; shall we? The evening is so lovely, it will do us both good."

I hesitated to agree, however—doubtful as to whether or not Julian himself might approve of this new and excessive freedom of action on our part. It straightway occurred to me that we should properly have asked for his opinion on the question before our starting for Waybridge.

As she had not infrequently done at other times, Felicia now read in a trice my present thoughts.

"Oh, Mr. Tressillian won't mind, bless you, dear," said she; "for it will be still daylight by the time we get back. Service here is over by eight o'clock; and it is quite light, you know, now, until half-past nine."

I yielded in the end to her persuasion, as I usually did; and explained to old Blake and the footman that they might return at once with the carriage, because after church we should walk home to Castlegrange.

Old Blake the coachman was a privileged retainer; and he forthwith offered a feeble expostulation in his wheezy asthmatic bass.

"But the shortest cut home'sard possible, miss, is a good four mile. Try how you will, you can't make it less."

"Oh, it's all right, Blake, my good man—never mind!" put in Felicia, in her off-hand way. "Come along, Hebe—make haste. The bells have stopped—the voluntary has begun."

And so the empty carriage rolled away.

The long brass hands upon the black face of the church-tower clock were pointing to the ten minutes past eight as we left the town behind us and set our faces homeward; that is, towards the down-going sun banked around with its plum-coloured and gold-tipped clouds. The high-road beyond Waybridge was at first a cheerful enough thoroughfare; for the towns-folk seemed all of them to have trooped in this direction for a gossip and a stroll before supper.

Felicia and I overtook and hastened past the various loitering groups; and nudgings and whisperings and smothered exclamations followed us, we were well aware.

But after quitting the long and dusty white high-road, our way for the course of a mile or two lay across lonely fields and meadows, with hedge-rows and ditches and alarming stile.

And the landscape around us was already growing dim; and far-away cottage lights among the thatch shone wanly through the pale-blue evening haze.

Before us, however, in the distance, whither-soever we looked, we could see the dark fringe and boundary rides of the forest; and so were always, as it were, within sight of home, towards which every step brought us nearer and nearer.

We entered the parkland presently through a gateway in a larch and hazel copse, and here we found it almost dark. Instinctively we quickened our steps, the dead leaves of a past year rustling in a ghostly manner about our feet; the undergrowth and wayside brambles catching, octopus-like, at our gowns as we passed.

We must have been somewhere in the neighbourhood of the forest lodge, because we could hear distinctly the ripple and gurgle of the woodland brook as it went tumbling on its jounced way downward to the green valley of the park.

By-and-by poor Felicia, in the woody gloom—as some grim bird of night, hawk, kite, or owl, flapped its strong wings in the dark branches overhead—stepped with awful suddenness into a dry rut full of dead leaves.

In an instant she was out of it; but she clutched my arm as she recovered her balance with a laugh that in reality was a scream. And immediately afterwards, somewhere not far off I fancied, in the timbered obscurity around us, a dog barked in reply.

"Horror!" exclaimed Felicia, shuddering—"I went *squash* down on something *alive*! a toad, an adder, or something loathsome, for I felt the creature writhe and spit under my very foot."

But I scarcely heard her; I was wondering somewhat uneasily about the dog which had barked as if in answer to Felicia's cry.

"Felicia," I whispered, "I don't half like this. Did you hear that dog? I believe there are trespassers—poachers—abroad to-night—"

"Pooh, dear," interrupted she. "It is hardly the right time of year for the appearance of such gentry, is it? That was a keeper's dog, I expect—probably one of Sampson's at the forest lodge."

"Do you really think so?" I rejoined dubiously, with a quick nervous glance over my

shoulder. "Well, let us hurry on at all events. Julian will be growing anxious concerning us; I am sure that he will; and—and perhaps displeased at what we have done."

By this time we had arrived at the more open and higher spaces of the park; level glades where the wild thyme grew and the rabbits frolicked at sunset; where the lingering twilight, fast deepening though it was, with long crimped streaks of coral pink veining here and there the pale apple-green sky, was nevertheless a decided relief after the gloom and the strange stealthy noises of the rides and copses we had just traversed.

"We can run down here," Felicia was soon saying; as she spoke, indicating with a nod the valley-path which led downward with many a gentle slope and curve to the precincts of the great old house itself; when by merest accident I turned my eyes to the right of us, where the greensward in broad free mossy undulations swept upward to the fringe of the northern ride, as it was called—the identical part of the forest in which, on one morning some six years before, when accompanied by my then companion and attendant Selina Ann, I had first seen Mrs. Vasper and the afflicted veiled Miss Knowles, together, slowly and silently, taking the midday air.

Hard by the mossy and fern-covered bank of that northern ride I now beheld an unwonted sight, which for the moment transfixed me where I stood and absolutely took away my breath.

"Felicia," I gasped, when I could speak, "I—I was right, you see, after all! Trespassers in the forest!—and gipsies, too, of all dreadful people! How on earth could they have got in? Who could have allowed them to pass the gates? Look yonder—there see!"

Felicia, following the direction of my gaze, was as much astonished as was I at what she then beheld.

For there beneath the cool umbrage of tall larch and silver beech, mighty oak and whispering elm, stood the painted caravan, the wanderers' house upon wheels; the shafts of it empty; the horse, near at hand, free of all trappings and encumbrance, cropping contentedly the dewy herbage round about; and with blue smoke issuing faintly from the squat, solitary chimney of the van.

Upon the vacant shafts sat a man, pipe in mouth, idly pulling the ears of a dog that stood, with upturned nose and swaying tail, between his knees; an animal either spaniel or collie, and presumably the one whose bark we had heard—a ferocious beast doubtless!

Another man, also with pipe in mouth, had come to the open door of the gipsy-cart; and, with hand upon the lintel, lounged there looking out over his companion's head at Felicia and me.

It had grown too dim and dusk to see distinctly the features of these bold intruders; but we knew them to be nomads and outlaws, and was not that enough?

"In lonely country places like this," whispered Felicia hurriedly, "I have two especial *bêtes noires*—cows and gipsies. I'm off!"

So saying, she started away down the winding valley path as fleetly as her nimble legs could bear her over the ground. I followed; nor did we once pause in our homeward flight until we had passed safely under the crumbling old monastic archway, with its masses of pendent ivy and its colony of bur-r-r-ing chafers, and gained the courtyard of Castlegrange.

There by the lilled fountain, laden with a sweet-smelling burthen of freshly-cut flowers, on his way to the crypt, we met Julian Tressillian.

In the dim cool light of the place he limped towards us, and said gravely, addressing me,—

"Hebe, is this wise? You sent the carriage home, I hear—"

"Yes—we did; but, thanks to Providence, we've come to no harm, we're all right now—though we might have been murdered up yonder, indeed," laughed Felicia, interrupting him, as well as she could for lack of breath; "for I'll tell you what is all wrong there, Mr. Tressillian. I don't know whether you are aware of it, or permit that kind of thing, but you have trespassers to-night in the forest—there are gipsies bivouacking in the north ride!"

And then, as I was still panting and could not

yet speak myself, she went on to tell Julian more fully what we had just seen upon the brow of the park.

"Gipsies here, you say! and so near to the house? Impossible!" he exclaimed, looking vexed. "No lodge-keeper of mine, valuing his situation, would ever have allowed them to enter. You and Hebe must have been deceived, Miss Luck," Julian said.

But we were both of us certain that we were not mistaken, and said so. Did we not know a gipsy's caravan when we saw one? And Felicia expressed a hope that hen-house and poultry-yard, to say nothing of swarming preserves so conveniently at hand, would remain unmolested by the vagabonds when it grew darker by and by.

"Well, I suppose, now, they must stop where they are until the morning," Julian said rather wearily, "no matter how they got in. Meanwhile, if they get taken red-handed in any mischief, why, they must take the consequences—that's all. However, I shall inquire into the business to-morrow; evidently there's something wrong somewhere; and then, if they have not vanished, these rascals must be sent to the right-about without further delay."

Julian, with his flowers, limped on towards the cloisters, and we two girls entered the barons' hall—Felicia saying, as she took off her hat and smoothed her wavy black hair, that could she have had her will or a voice in the matter, the wretches and their caravan should have been packed off the place forthwith, and sent to the right-about that night.

CHAPTER XXVII.

On the following morning, as it happened, we learned that the early post had brought important letters to Castlegrange; and at breakfast Julian announced to us girls and Mrs. Vasper that the carriage had been ordered round for half-past nine, and that he was going to town.

Mrs. Vasper's pale eyelashes just flickered at the intelligence; and she said still,—

"Then you will catch, I presume, the 10.13 from Waybridge, Julian?"

"Yes," said Julian.

"And may I inquire, Julian, whether you will return to-night?" said Mrs. Vasper.

"Certainly, if I can. My chief business is with bankers and brokers, and their hours, as you know, are over at four."

Then turning to me, he asked me kindly whether there was anything that I wanted—anything that he could bring home to me from London?—and I answered him in tones more earnest perhaps than I was conscious of at the moment.

"Thank you, Julian; indeed there is nothing. Have I not everything here that mortal in reason can wish? Nay, more even."

"And you, Miss Luck?" courteously to Felicia.

"Oh, a hundred things!" cried she promptly. "My wants, both real and imaginary, are insatiable. But I will be magnanimous, Mr. Tressillian, and spare you. Believe me, bitterly would you repent your good-nature, were I to take advantage of it, and were you to undertake seriously all the commissions I might give you—if I could!"

Here were precisely the air and the tone in Felicia Luck which met with Mrs. Vasper's especial condemnation; and now, in recognition of them, that drably-tinted lady stiffened visibly. She put up her hands to her narrow head, pressed the thin hair bands more closely over her ears, and gave vent to a sound which in anybody else would have been a cough or a snort of reproof or disdain.

Felicia Luck, having speedily discerned that she and this cold, pale woman were what she—Felicia herself—sketchily described as "antagonistic," had now become perfectly indifferent as to any new impression, either good or ill, that she might produce on the mind of Mrs. Vasper. So she chattered on, in her random thoughtless way,—

"Why, it reminds me of something, Mr. Tressillian, your going away unexpectedly in this manner and asking us before you set out on your journey whether there is aught that you can bring home to us when you return from it! Now, I wonder, what does it remind me of?"

She leaned back in her chair and played rapidly upon her forehead with the fingers of her left hand, so pondering the trivial question of the moment.

"Now . . . what is it! . . . t't, t't, t't—Ah, I have it!" she cried all at once triumphantly, "the story of Beauty and the Beast, don't you know! Of course! Where the poor old father, you remember, is going on a journey, and says to his daughters before he starts—"

Then in a flash it seemed to occur to her that this, for a simile, was a grave over-stepping of the bounds of tact and good taste—was horribly *mal à propos* in fact; and colouring dusky, she laughed rather awkwardly, and somehow managed to turn the drift of the talk. But Mrs. Vasper, without a rustle, rose and left the breakfast-room to go to her niece upstairs.

I ventured then to glance at Julian. Yes, I knew it! There was a pained, tired look on that sensitive brow of his; in the lines near his sad dark eyes; and in my heart I was as certain as if he had openly acknowledged the fact, that my kinsman's fine nerves had winced to agony at Felicia's pointless allusion to the story of Beauty and the Beast.

Later, when we were upstairs in our pretty octagonal sitting-room, looking at the morning papers before going out for our customary constitutional in the forest, I could not help saying reproachfully,—

"I don't altogether think, dear, that you ought to have said what you did, you know, to Julian at breakfast; I mean, about—the old man and his daughters. It—it wasn't exactly nice of you, Felicia. It sounded rather rude—*gauche*—to say the very least."

"Pon my word and honour, it was a slip," she laughed. "I wasn't thinking of a scrap of what I was saying at the time—indeed I wasn't, Hebe. But I flatter myself that I stopped in time; and there was really no harm done, after all. He didn't mind."

"But I believe that he *did* mind," I rejoined warmly. "You should remember that he is not so very old—only forty-three or forty-four; certainly not more; and that is no age worth speaking of for a man. And—and, besides, there was neither sense nor reason, none whatever, Felicia, in talking like that of Beauty and the Beast. It was utterly witless—absurd!"

"No wit? No sense? Oh, yes, there was—plenty, when you come to think of it! Why, you, darling, of course, are Beauty here at Castlegrange; and he is the Beast of the fairy story—ha, ha, ha!—and a very kind, dear, lovable Beast he is, too, into the bargain. That's my opinion if you want it," cried Felicia, flippantly. "I only wish that he would take it into his shaggy head to fall sick and die o' love for me; I'd not care a straw if he was never changed into a handsome charming fairy-tale prince—not I! I would be content with him just as he is. But heigho! what's the good of wishing! If wishes were horses beggars would ride. With poor me, I greatly fear, it is a case of 'hope on, hope ever,' until—"

"You can indeed be very odious—*low*! I had nearly said—when you choose, Felicia," I interrupted frigidly, yet now, I believe, more in sorrow than in anger.

"Possibly. All things considered, it is not perhaps to be wondered at!" She laughed significantly, but serenely as ever. "Yet, darling, I fancy I have heard that same unpalatable speech from you once or twice before—true as it may be! However, hard words break no bones, thank goodness, and—Hark! yes; there goes the carriage taking him to the station."

She ran to the sitting-room window and leaned out; but here, in our remote turretted angle of the old building, the chief approach to Castlegrange could not be seen.

"Adieu, dear Beast," said Felicia, in a voice of mock deep melancholy, at the same time waving from the window a dramatic farewell to

an imaginary Julian in an imaginary vanishing carriage; well-knowing, of course, that the ridiculous pantomime was visible only to me in the room immediately behind her. "Adieu, dear Beast; mind you do not forget us in the little village! We love pretty things. Hebe would like a ribbon or a string of pearls, or something, to tie up her bonny red hair; and I, you know—"

"Yes; speak for yourself, if you please, and leave me out of the question altogether," I threw in, laughing in spite of my vexation; because, as I had discovered long ago, Felicia was incorrigible, and it was simply folly and waste of time to be angry with her, desperately trying as she could be when she chose.

"Stay, though! I am getting a trifle 'mixed,' am I not?" she said, with an air of drollery that was irresistible. "Of course! 'Twas the good old man, the father, as we said just now, who had to go on a journey; and the poor dear amiable Beast who laid him down at eventide to die of love in the castle garden, where grew the roses which were the cause of all the mischief . . . Now, Hebe, pet, don't sulk—it's unbecoming; and, moreover, it is time that we were out of doors. It is a downright sin to waste so heavenly a morning within the house. Do you hear? Come!"

Ten minutes later we were out in the quadrangle, as good friends once more as ever we had been, debating whether we should drive into Waybridge—for Felicia had discovered that she was rather in need of some embroidery silks—or whether we should spend the morning, with novels and a luncheon basket, in one of our favourite dells of the forest.

But suddenly we recollected our adventure of the previous evening—the scare we had experienced on our way home from church upon the borders of the north ride. Plainly, the unlooked for business of a hurried journey to London had put all thought of the gipsies out of Julian's head.

"I think," said Felicia, sensibly enough now, "before we do anything else, we ought properly to go and reconnoitre, and ascertain whether those wretches have 'folded their tents, like the Arabs, and as silently stolen away' during the night. Evidently Mr. Tressillian had forgotten all about them this morning; and should we find that the men and their horrid caravan are, still where they were last night, we must raise an alarm at once, let the keepers know, and they'll pretty quickly send them packing; I've no doubt."

"Why, you have grown courageous all at once, Felicia. It was only last night that you said that you loathed gipsies and crows," I reminded her.

She protested, now, that broad daylight made all the difference in the world.

"Cows, of course, at all times and seasons, I dread and abhor. Gipsies and tramps, more particularly perhaps at nightfall, in a wood or upon a lonely road. Come along; Mr. Tressillian, I am convinced, on his return, will say that we did the right thing; and, Hebe dear, in this life, you know, it is always as well to earn approbation, compliments if possible, wherever and whenever one can!"

So off we started at a brisk pace through the beautiful park valley, all aglitter with dew and sunshine, and sweet with fresh, morning, grassy smells, and climbed the hilly winding path in the direction of the north ride.

Ah—no! yes! There, still on the cool and shadowy confines of the dense north plantation, stood the disreputable wanderers' caravan, exactly as we had seen it on the previous evening, and as bold as brass, as Felicia now said, indignantly.

And there, too, was the vagabond horse, also as on the night before, browsing unconcernedly within sight and call of the house on wheels.

But it was with considerable astonishment, not to say excitement, that we now discerned that this self-same animal, as viewed by clear and sunny daylight, was plump, glossy, well-to-do-looking in every respect—no starved, skeleton, unhappy-eyed brute purchased for a pound or two from a knacker's yard; and the caravan it-



"FELICIA," HEER GASPED, "I—I WAS RIGHT, YOU SEE, AFTER ALL."

self, we by degrees realized next, was a smart, almost dandy-looking affair of its kind, painted a dark-green, enlivened with a suspicion of red; and with blinds or curtains of Liberty silk adorning, with knots of ribbon and glimpses of lace, the little shining windows of the gipsy house.

"Well, I never!" ejaculated Felicia, under her breath.

Smoke was curling softly upward from the metal chimney-pot to the sun-flecked oak branches which spread above the van roof; but the men themselves, this morning, were nowhere visible; neither was their dog, it seemed—the plump browsing horse, with the lazily "swishing" tail, was the only living object in the neighbourhood of the caravan.

"Beautiful audacity, upon my word!" commented Felicia, aloud now. "Let us hasten directly and make inquiries at the forest lodge."

This we did; and there found Mrs. Sampson, the keeper's wife, busy at her wash-tub in the porch, humming an ancient ditty to herself as she rubbed and scrubbed and slapped away at the family linen.

Perceiving visitors, however, she dried her arms hastily in her apron, curtsying the while to me and Felicia, who had whispered, as we approached the lodge-door, that it would be more seemly, she thought, if I and not she were spokeswoman on the occasion.

So I explained to Mrs. Sampson what our errand was; adding that Mr. Tressillian himself had said overnight that he could not believe it possible that either she or her husband had wittingly allowed the vagabonds to pass the gates.

"Not us indeed, miss—neither me nor Sampson, I do assure you!" protested Mrs. Sampson warmly. "But—now I come to think of it—surely you must be wrong, begging your pardon for saying so, miss, o' course. There's no gipsies in the park or forest here—"

"But we tell you, my good woman, that it is so," struck in Felicia impatiently, unable, after all, to hold her tongue. "They were here last

night, these vagrants; we saw them, Mrs. Sampson; and they are not gone this morning, as Miss Fairburn says. You can see their caravan for yourself if you doubt our word—yonder upon the edge of the north ride."

The keeper's wife by this time was smiling broadly.

"A carryvan, Miss—yes; I see what you mean, ladies, now; but I thought you was wrong—begging your pardon again—when you said gipsies! Why, if you'll take my word for it, Miss Fairburn, they're gentlemen, real gentlemen, as belongs to that there horse and carryvan. I believe they're a sort of artist-gents, a-going about the country for pleasure and that—But there," Mrs. Sampson broke off. "I should have thought, miss, myself, that you ladies must ha' seen something of 'em afore this; for they said on Saturday as they meant to go down to the house and call on Mr. Tressillian."

Felicia and I could only stare and wonder. What could be the meaning of it? Whilst Mrs. Sampson went glibly on; enjoying, after the manner of her class, the music of her own tongue.

"On last Saturday afternoon it was—let me see! Yes! about half-past five—that they come along here; and the young fair one of the two, as pleasant-spoken a young gentleman, he is, as ever stepped in shoe-leather, and with lots to say for himself, miss—he said as he had arrived by special invitation from the Squire, and had brought his friend, the tall quiet gentleman with the big moustache, down into the country along with him.

"O' course, then, miss, I let them in, carryvan and all; what could I do! And when I opened the gates he dropped a crown-piece into my hand, and said with a laugh,—'Don't you admire our travelling carriage, ma'am!' jest as pleasant and affable like as could be; and then yesterday morning, jest about the time I was getting the children ready for church, he—the handsome young fair one, I mean, ladies—he comes up to the door, smiling and taking off his hat, for all the world as if I had been a lady bred and born,

and he says to me, he says—'I want you, ma'am, to be kind and hospitable enough to sell us a loaf of bread; a big one, if you please; to get us along, don't you know, until to-morrow.' Jest like that. And although it was Sunday morning, and the bells were going for church, I really hadn't the heart to be sour-like and refuse; and—well, miss, he actually gave me a shilling for that loaf, and wouldn't hear o' no change—not he!—and—"

"And we should feel exceedingly grateful to you, ma'am, if you could kindly spare us another, as good as the last, this morning—to save us a journey into Lowbranch village, don't you know!" here cried a blithe, clear voice immediately behind us.

Felicia and I, not unnaturally, started violently and turned together.

There, now confronting us, in the full glare of the summer morning sunlight, we beheld two men; alike attired negligently in loose velvetene coats and soft slouched hats of the sombrero pattern.

The younger of the two I knew at a glance was Bertie Wilford; in the elder I as speedily recognised his friend Mr. Aragon!

(To be continued.)

WOODEN shoes in France are produced to the extent of about 4,000,000 pairs yearly. They are made in Alsace and Barriers by machinery, and in Lozère by hand. In the last-named province 1,700 persons are engaged in this manufacture, and the yearly product is more than half-a-million pairs. The best are made of maple; in the provinces nearly every lady possesses a pair of the finer sabots for wearing out in damp weather. These have monograms and other designs carved on the vamps, and they are kept on the foot by ornamented leather pieces over the instep. The manufacture of these pieces of leather is a regular business in France.



"YOUR PRIDE IS YOUR IDOL. I WILL DRAG IT TO THE GROUND AND TRAMPLE IT IN THE MIRE!" SAID ISABEL GRANT.

THE GRANT PEDIGREE.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

It was a glorious day in early summer. The sun's light and warmth fell straight from a clear blue sky, tempered by scarcely a single cloud.

The little village of Bloxholm lay asleep in the brilliant sunshine; the blinds were drawn down at the windows of the neat, trim cottages; the streets were deserted, the hum of the children in the small, old-fashioned school-building was faint and drowsy; even the dogs, who generally heralded the approach of a stranger by a succession of surly, menacing growls, lay still in their secluded retreats, with lolling out-stretched tongues, and made no sign.

The only figure that lent any appearance of life to the almost total solitude was that of a tall, handsome man, apparently in the first blush of early manhood, who strode up the village street with the easy swinging gait of the trained pedestrian.

Presently he too paused and entered the open doorway of the Chequers Inn.

The landlord, a portly personage with well-developed stomach and rubicund face, sat in his shirt-sleeves, languidly wiping his brow with a large red handkerchief.

He looked at the stranger with admiring envy.

"Walked from the station, sir?" he asked, tentatively. "You must have found it very hot."

"Yes," answered the young man with a laugh, "the sun's rays are strong. Your room is quite cool and refreshing; if you have any light beverage, I shall be glad to rest a little."

Seating himself in one of the capacious chairs he produced a large meerschaum pipe, and proceeded leisurely to fill it.

Judged by critical canons, perhaps, the stranger was not strictly handsome. His feature were irregular, and his cheek-bones rather too high and prominent.

His hair was dark brown and covered his head in short close curls, while in the depths of his blue eyes there twinkled a merry humour.

His teeth were white and even, and his chin gave promise of a firm resolution.

In build he was not quite proportionate; his limbs were a trifle too long, and although fairly well developed, he possessed scarcely sufficient breadth for his height.

His complexion, originally fair, had suffered from exposure to a hot sun, but with all these minor blemishes, Hugh Mellish was still a goodly person to look upon.

"Landlord," he said presently, "how far it is to Bardney?"

"Three miles by the road; two across the heath."

"Thanks; is the way across the heath feasible for a stranger?"

"Perfectly, there is no difficulty; turn down the lane at the end of the village, it leads to the heath, and once there, you can make no mistake."

The young man finished his pipe, and bidding the landlord "Good-day," strolled on towards the lane.

The sun's power had now somewhat declined and over the wide common blew a gentle breeze which fanned his cheeks with its refreshing breath.

For some time he walked on heedlessly, paying little attention to the direction in which he was travelling, until suddenly he paused and glanced around with a comical smile.

It was evident that he had strayed some considerable distance from the beaten track, and unfortunately there existed no landmarks by which he might steer his course.

He was standing on the top of a gentle declivity, and as he reached the opposite brow, he saw at his feet a young girl, sauntering slowly along,

protected from the sun's heat by an upraised parasol.

Courteously doffing his hat, Hugh said with a shade of deference in his tone,—

"Pardon me, madam, I am a stranger here, and am seeking Bardney, the residence of Squire Grant; I greatly fear I have mistaken my road."

The girl looked into his face an instant, and as if satisfied asked,—

"Are you Mr. Hugh Mellish the artist?"

"Yes," he answered, with a slight expression of surprise, "I am Hugh Mellish, and Mr. Grant has given me a commission to execute his daughter's portrait. I came down by the eleven train, to Stickney, and leaving my luggage at the station proceeded to walk to Bardney. And this is the result," he added comically.

The girl joined in his laughter.

"It is nothing very serious," she said, "you are nearly at the end of your journey, and if you will accompany me, I will take you to Bardney. I am Honor Grant—Mr. Grant's daughter."

Hugh glanced at the maiden with scarcely concealed admiration. She was a tall, slim girl, with a rhythmic grace in her movements, that appealed sensibly to his artistic temperament.

Her face was oval in shape, and framed in a mass of soft silken-textured brown hair. Her skin was pink and white, and had a touch of velvety softness like the bloom of the peach.

Her eyes were hazel in colour and fringed with heavy lashes, while the rich red lips formed a fitting casket for the pearly teeth within.

They proceeded for some distance in silence; but presently Honor spoke again.

"You must have found your journey very trying, but perhaps you do not mind the heat."

"No; I am used to a hot climate and rather enjoy a blaze of sunshine; still I must confess the walk has tired me, and I shall not be sorry to reach Bardney."

"Have you met my father?"

"No, we are perfect strangers; I owe his

invitation to my acquaintance with Lord Foxon. Mr. Grant, I believe, saw my portrait of Lady Foxon, and was pleased to approve of it."

"Yes, he was quite enthusiastic about it, and my father is not easily moved. But see, there is Bardney; does it not form a pretty picture?" and she pointed to the Hall snugly embowered amongst a mass of noble trees. "The main entrance," she continued, "lies to our left, but a private gate close at hand will save us a wide detour."

He followed her passively; he had quite forgotten the object of his visit; it seemed as though he had unconsciously stumbled into Fairyland, and he almost feared to speak lest his dream should be broken.

At the Hall door, Honor said with a delicious little pout,—

"Do you know, Mr. Mellish, I am disappointed; I have led you through some of our most beautiful scenery, and you have not expressed one word of admiration; indeed I believe you have scarcely noticed a single object of interest."

He started as if roused from a reverie.

"Pardon me, Miss Grant," he stammered, with an air of confusion. "My mind was so engrossed in one beautiful picture, that really I had not room for the contemplation of any other."

The pretty pink flush in her cheeks deepened, and the heavy silken lashes drooped momentarily over the soft brown eyes, but she made him no answer, and showing him into the morning-room, she departed to seek her father.

Staniland Grant, or the Squire as he was locally termed, was a tall, handsome man in the prime of life.

His hair was brown, but several shades darker than his daughter's; he had deep hazel eyes, and his features were bold and clearly cut.

In figure he combined strength with a graceful delicacy. His limbs, though powerful, were exquisitely modelled, and his hands were white and shapely.

Staniland Grant was a good type of a race now gradually dying out.

For untold generations the Grants had been the Bardney Squires; the family traced their genealogy back in unbroken succession to a time long anterior to the Norman Conquest, and from the stupendous heights of his family pride, Staniland looked down with a contemptuous amusement upon the mushroom nobles of yesterday's growth, who took precedence of him in rank.

Twice he had rejected with scorn the offer of a peerage, and this action was in keeping with that of his predecessors.

In his opinion Squire Grant of Bardney was a far more honourable title than any that could be bestowed upon him, and this sense of his family's importance coloured every action of his life.

He was not particularly wealthy, but money in his estimation occupied a very secondary position.

Bardney Hall was an ancient mansion, substantially built, though with little pretension to architectural beauty.

The main entrance was approached by a splendid carriage-drive, and was bordered on either side by rows of tall stately trees, which at the time our story commences were crowded with beautiful foliage.

The young artist rose, as the Squire entered the room.

"You are Mr. Mellish," he said, "welcome to Bardney sir; I trust your visit may prove a pleasant one."

Hugh's face flushed, as he remembered the nature of his introduction.

"The beginning at least augurs well," he answered, and then paused abruptly with an embarrassed air.

The Squire took no notice of his awkward manner, but remarked kindly,—

"I suppose you left your luggage at the station."

"Yes! one of the officials offered to forward it; it should soon be here."

"Perhaps you would like to go to your room, or will you take some refreshment? we do not dine until six."

"Thank you; I prefer to wait until dinner, but I shall be glad to be shown my room."

Mr. Grant struck the bell for one of the maids, who escorted Hugh to the tastily-furnished chamber that had been prepared for him.

Left to himself Hugh walked to the window and gazed out upon the park, though his eyes saw but little of the beautiful scenery stretching beneath him; his whole being was wrapped up in the contemplation of a girl's face.

A pair of soft brown eyes, now lit with a merry smile, now veiled by their heavy lashes; fair white cheeks with tints of carmine; a pretty rose-bud mouth, flanked on either side by a charming dimple; this was the picture printed on the young man's brain.

"Pshaw!" he said impatiently, "it is absurd. Who am I that I should dare to dream of such a thing! A poor artist; with little besides his profession; while she with her youth and beauty and position is fit for the highest peer in the realm."

Nevertheless, when later on he was deputed to take Honor in to dinner, the mere touch of the delicate fingers sent a burning thrill through every nerve, and he could not restrain the warm glow of colour in his face.

Besides himself there was no other guest, so that he had ample opportunity for studying his new friends.

The Squire and Honor, he had already met, and Mrs. Grant was a quiet, gentle lady with an air of sorrow underlying her beautiful face, towards whom Hugh felt himself instinctively drawn.

After dinner they adjourned to the drawing-room, and Honor sat down to the piano, which was an almost invariable custom, and Hugh turned over her music.

The girl had a sweet rich voice, not very powerful, but well-trained, and imbued with the spirit of song.

After two or three simple old world ballads, she said,—

"Do you sing, Mr. Mellish? Oh, yes, I feel sure you do, and that you will sing for us now; it will be quite a change after my performance."

The Squire and his wife joined in the request, and Hugh willingly complied.

Amongst the young artist's many accomplishments was that of music.

He possessed a magnificent tenor voice, and as he poured forth song after song, Mr. and Mrs. Grant forgot their game of backgammon, and sat listening to him entranced.

"Thank you," exclaimed Mrs. Grant, with genuine admiration, when he concluded; "I have not enjoyed myself so much for a long time," and her husband nodded his head in approbation.

"You have a fortune in your voice, Mr. Mellish," he said, "if painting fails."

Hugh laughed lightly.

"I trust I may never have to depend upon it. Music is my hobby, but I should not care to make my living by it."

Honor alone expressed no opinion, but her eyes betrayed her thoughts and Hugh was fully satisfied.

That night, long after the others had retired to rest, he continued to sit by his open window, his heart full of mingled pain and sweetness, for he knew that for weal or woe he had met the one woman in the world for whom he would lay down his life, and at the same time he recognised the almost hopeless nature of his passion.

A poor artist aspiring to the hand of Staniland Grant's daughter!

It was a mad ambition, and yet on the chances of making her his wife was staked the whole happiness of his existence.

CHAPTER II.

EARLY the next morning Hugh was awakened on his light slumber, by the sun's rays streaming in through his window, and bathing the room in a flood of brilliancy.

Rising from his bed, he made a hasty toilet, and proceeded downstairs.

None of the family apparently were yet awake, but the servants were stirring, and he found the hall door open.

Passing through, he stepped forward briskly in the direction of the park.

Everything was still and silent, save the rustling of a gentle breeze amidst the foliage, and the joyous twitter of the birds as they flew, hither and thither, seeking food for their young ones.

The scene was very fair and beautiful, and shaking off a slight feeling of sadness, Hugh strode merrily forward.

Presently he came to a little gate, and he had already placed his hand on the latch, when the sound of voices reached him, and in another instant he stood facing Honor Grant.

"Good-morning, Mr. Mellish," she cried, a trifle saucily, though the crimson deepened in her cheeks. "I did not dream you were an early riser; I had an impression that you Londoners seldom put in an appearance until the earth was well aired. But let me introduce our good friend and neighbour, Mr. Mardon of the Grange."

Hugh glanced at the girl's companion and courteously acknowledged his salutation.

He was a stout, jovial-looking man with a splendid physique and a glow of health in his ruddy cheeks.

His face was clean-shaven save for a short, bristly moustache, in which the first few grey hairs could just be distinguished.

He complimented Hugh in a deep, resonant voice on his partiality for morning exercise, and expressed a hope that he should soon see him at the Grange.

Hugh thanked him, and with a genial farewell they parted, Mr. Mardon walking away with a perplexed look in his eyes, and with knitted brows, as though he were striving to unravel some knotty problem.

The other two turned towards the house, and Hugh's heart beat fast as he walked beside his lovely companion.

He had thought her beautiful the night before, but this morning in her simple costume, with a white sailor hat perched daintily on her head, she was absolutely bewitching, and all Hugh's doubts and fears and prudent misgivings were thrown to the winds.

It was useless to speculate on what might happen; he loved her, he told himself passionately; for him the world contained but this one woman, and he would be a fool indeed to refuse this brief, delicious taste of happiness.

For several minutes they proceeded in silence, until Honor said shyly,—

"How strange that we should meet like this?"

"Yes!" he assented, "I little anticipated the pleasant surprise that awaited me. Do you often go out before breakfast?"

"It is an almost invariable rule. The gate where you met me separates Mr. Mardon's estate from Bardney, and was made for my convenience; I frequently visit the Grange before my folks are stirring."

"Mr. Mardon, I presume is a very old friend?"

"Yes, papa and he were boys together; he has lived at the Grange all his life."

"It is curious," the young man said presently, in a low tone, almost as if communing with his own thoughts, "what a change a few hours will effect in a man's sentiments. Yesterday, I fancied my position one of the happiest in the world; I would not have changed places with a monarch. To be a successful artist seemed the noblest summit of a man's ambition; to carve one niche in the temple of Fame, I would gladly have sacrificed life itself. Now I begin to wish I had been born a country gentleman, and could almost envy your friend, Mr. Mardon."

Honor gazed at him with a startled, wondering expression.

"And give up your chances of making a name in the great world!" she cried. "Lose your individuality; forfeit your splendid prospects; and for what? to sink into the common throng; to be a mere private, when your talents entitle you to take rank as a leader of men; surely you are jesting!"

Hugh smiled, sadly.

"Miss Grant, I do not jest; I am but speaking the sober truth. You are young, and the young are proverbially generous, but even you, with a few added years' experience, will admit the truth of my remarks, and will acknowledge that in the eyes of society the greatest genius is not the equal of the lucky possessor of an ancient name and an ample fortune."

"I know little of society's views," she replied, "but, for my part, I think men of genius are the born leaders of the world, and society is hardly likely to alter my opinion."

They had approached the hall, and Hugh was endeavouring to frame some reply, which should not reveal his secret too plainly, when she exclaimed, merrily,—

"Listen! there is the bell; a summons not lightly to be disregarded; breakfast is an institution at Bardney."

She tripped lightly away, leaving him to follow in more leisurely fashion, for his brain was in a whirl at the absurd fancies her little speech had conjured up.

The Squire and his wife greeted him kindly, and Mrs. Grant asked if he had enjoyed his ramble.

"Yes!" he answered, "the beauty of the morning tempted me, and the park was really delightful. But," he continued, with a smile, glancing towards Honor, "I discovered I was not the only early riser in Bardney."

Mr. Grant laughed. "My daughter does not count," he said, "she has always evinced a morbid taste for leaving her bed when the dawn breaks; I often wonder why she troubles to retire at all."

"Take care, father; remember I have a defender now; Mr. Mellish appreciates the beauty of the early day, and together we shall prove more than a match for you."

"I'll warrant Mr. Mellish is but a recent convert," the Squire said; "I expect his landlady could tell us a different story."

Hugh joined in the general laugh, while Mrs. Grant suggested that he was not obliged to incriminate himself.

After breakfast the ladies disappeared, and Mr. Grant led Hugh to the room which he had selected for a studio.

"You might let the servants unpack your things here," he said. "But I should not make a beginning to-day. I have a little business to transact while you are unpacking; then I am at your service until luncheon."

Time passed very pleasantly for Hugh during that first week at Bardney. Every morning Honor and her mother came to the studio, while he sketched, with firm yet delicate strokes, the beautiful features which had made such havoc with his peace of mind. The remainder of the day was at his own disposal, and after dinner Honor and he played and sang, while the Squire and his wife settled down to their invariable game of backgammon.

One evening Mr. Mardon came to dinner, bringing with him his daughter Ethel, a tall fair girl with light blue eyes, and pretty, though irregular features.

The two girls were evidently fast friends, and Hugh noticed that both Mr. Grant and his wife treated her with marked kindness and consideration.

"Miss Mardon appears to be a general favourite," he remarked to Honor, who replied, enthusiastically,—

"We all love Ethel, she is so good; someday, you know, we hope she will be joined to us by a dearer tie still. But how very foolish of me! of course you have not heard, but it is not a secret; everyone knows my father's strongest wish is, that she will marry my brother Ralph. You have not seen Ralph; he is in London at present, studying for the Bar. He is very ambitious, and has made up his mind to enter Parliament, much against my father's inclination."

Hugh's heart bounded as he listened, for this discovery seemed to lessen the gulf between himself and the girl he had learned to love so passionately. Hitherto he had looked upon Honor as Staniland Grant's heiress, and as such, utterly beyond his aspirations; but under these circumstances, perhaps—perhaps! he dared not think

about it yet, only the light in his eyes deepened, and his face glowed unconsciously with a happier smile.

On the following afternoon he started out for a solitary ramble; the Squire had gone to a neighbouring town, and Honor was attending her mother who had a severe attack of neuralgia. By some chance he directed his steps towards the Grange, and in the course of his walk encountered Roger Mardon.

A strange attraction had grown up between these two men, and Roger greeted the young artist with extreme cordiality.

"I suppose your visit to Bardney will soon come to an end?" he remarked, as they proceeded slowly in the direction of the Grange.

"Yes," said Hugh, regretfully. "Miss Grant's portrait is nearly completed, at least as far as the sittings are concerned."

The elder man glanced critically at the speaker.

"Shall you be sorry?" he asked.

"Yes! my sojourn has been very pleasant; everyone has been exceedingly kind."

"Including Honor?"

Hugh's face flushed a vivid red, but before he could speak Roger continued,—

"Don't be angry, it is no business of mine; only one cannot be blind, and as a friend I would advise you not to build too much on that hope."

"I do not know, Mr. Mardon," Hugh began, hotly—but the other interrupted him.

"It is very rude of me to interfere, but I do not like to see you rushing headlong into misery. You do not know Staniland Grant as I do; he is one of the proudest men in the country. Pride of birth is his fetish; he bows himself down before it and worships it. He cares little or nothing for wealth or genius or even rank. For him the world is divided into two classes, the well-born and the mere nobodies. His own family shows an unbroken lineage for many hundreds of years. Have you never seen his wonderful genealogical tree? No! well, unless I am much mistaken, that is a treat in store. It is all very absurd I admit, still there is the fact, and it is useless running one's head against a stone wall. Even had he never succeeded to the estate, I fancy he would have been nearly as bad, but when his elder brother died, the disease became a monomania."

"Was Mr. Grant then a younger son?" The young man spoke listlessly, but he felt he was expected to say something.

"Yes; his elder brother, John Grant, was my great friend. He was a very different lad to Staniland, high-spirited, of a roving disposition, and perhaps a trifle wild, though I never knew anything really evil in him. Shortly after his mother's death (Staniland avers that his brother broke her heart), he sailed for America, and was drowned on the voyage. But that is an interlude; we were discussing Staniland, and unless you possess a string of great grandfathers dating back at least as far as the Conquest, I warn you, that there is very little chance of succeeding in your project."

Hugh laughed bitterly.

"I am sure you mean to do me a kindness," he said, "though you can hardly expect me to show much gratitude. I suppose it may be taken for granted that I have had some ancestors, though practically, I cannot lay claim to even a single grandfather. Even my father I scarcely remember, and though he was, I believe, a gentleman, his occupation would scarcely commend itself to Mr. Grant, for he was an Australian squatter. He must have been fairly well off, for on my mother's death I found myself in possession of nearly four hundred pounds a year; but that, as you say, is beside the point."

Mardon listened to the young man's story with a grave face, and at its conclusion he said kindly,—

"I am really grieved at what has happened, for I have grown to like you wonderfully; but you will not take it ill that I have spoken!"

"No!" answered Hugh frankly, "you have given me a bitter pill to swallow, but I recognise your kind intentions, though I warn you fairly

that if I can gain Honor's love I will brave her father's anger."

Mr. Mardon shook his head sadly.

"A wilful man must have his way," he said, "but it is quite hopeless. However, I have done what I could to prepare you, and if a miracle should be worked on your behalf, I shall be the first to congratulate you, but I am far from sanguine."

CHAPTER III.

IN spite of his well-assumed confidence, it was with a heavy heart Hugh Mellish returned to Bardney. Possessing plenty of shrewd, practical common-sense, he could not but acknowledge the force of Mardon's communication. In an ordinary way, perhaps, there was little inequality between Honor's position and his own. Certainly she had the advantage in birth, but on the other hand her fortune must necessarily be small, while in addition to his private income, the sale of his pictures, produced sufficient to support her in comfort, if not in luxury.

His name was becoming more and more known in the world of art, and it was with a touch of righteous pride he reflected that even now, amongst those who estimated ability at its true worth, he towered head and shoulders above Staniland Grant.

The next morning Mrs. Grant was sufficiently recovered to be present at breakfast, and her sharp eyes instantly detected the change in the young man's countenance, though she was far from divining the cause.

"Mr. Mellish," she said with motherly solicitude, "you are not well; you need a rest."

"A trifling depression, that is all," Hugh answered lightly, "which a little work will banish. Besides, my holiday—for I look upon my stay here in that light—is nearly ended; to-morrow I return to London."

He addressed himself to Mrs. Grant, but he could not fail to notice Honor's start of surprise, and his heart bounded with a secret joy.

"Must you really go so soon?" Mrs. Grant asked; "we were planning a little excursion for to-morrow, a kind of picnic on a small scale in Nightingale Valley; you ought not to leave Bardney without visiting our only show-place."

Hugh glanced at Honor, and something in her eyes made him say, smilingly,—

"My time is scarcely so precious but that I can afford myself an extra day."

"Then we will consider it settled," she returned, and again Hugh stole a glance at Honor, but this time in vain, for her eyes were veiled by their heavy lashes, and she kept her head bent.

After luncheon he accompanied the ladies to the Grange, and found Ethel, who met them in the highest spirits. She kissed Honor and Mrs. Grant, and turning to Hugh exclaimed,—

"You are coming to-morrow, Mr. Mellish, are you not?"

Receiving his answer in the affirmative, she continued,—

"That is right, I am so glad, Honor, the Peytons are coming, and will bring their cousins, so we shall muster quite a respectable party, and papa says the weather is certain to be gloriously fine."

Then Mr. Mardon appeared, and the conversation became general.

"Does your husband join us?" he asked, addressing Mrs. Grant.

"I think not; he has some county business to attend, which I fear may detain him. Perhaps he may drive to meet us on our return."

"Then you and I will have to keep each other in countenance; it is a great responsibility to undertake the management of these giddy young people," a remark which provoked a laughing remonstrance from Ethel and Honor.

The morning of the picnic broke clear and bright, and Mr. Mardon's prognostications as to lovely weather appeared likely to be verified. The Squire took his departure directly after breakfast, promising to join them later, if it were possible. Hugh spent an hour packing his boxes, for he intended leaving early the next day, while

Mrs. Grant and her daughter were busy superintending the storing of provisions.

Presently they were joined by Ethel Mardon, and Hugh fancied somehow that under the ringing laugh and the joyous sallies, he detected a shadow of veiled sadness, which, perhaps, might be accounted for by a remark which fell from Mrs. Grant.

"No, my dear," he heard that lady say, "we have had no letter from Ralph; if he does not write soon I shall become anxious myself."

The girl sighed heavily, but apparently she banished her care, and was soon rattling on as merrily as ever.

By a strong effort Hugh managed to sustain some share in the conversation, though his remarks consisted chiefly in monosyllabic answers to Mrs. Grant's questions.

The beautiful face opposite him with the clear, hazel eyes, and peach like complexion, held his attention; in a few short hours he was going away, and Mr. Mardon's warning weighed heavily upon his heart.

He must speak to Honor, that was certain, she should learn his story from his own lips, and he would ask her to be his wife. If she refused, he would go away and bear his burden as best he could; but if she loved him, all the squires in England should not prevent his marrying her.

It was not until after luncheon, when the whole party, with the exception of Mrs. Grant and the owner of the Grange, sallied off to view some object of interest, that Hugh's opportunity came.

"You are not in your usual good spirits, Mr. Mellish," Honor said. "are you not well?"

They had stopped to rest, half way up the wooded slope; Ethel and her companions had reached the top and disappeared, and they were alone. Hugh gazed at the girl without answering, and something she saw in his eyes caused her own to droop.

"Have you forgotten, Miss Grant, that this is my last day at Bardney, and is not that sufficient reason for my low spirits?"

A wave of colour over-ran her face, but she replied steadily,—

"There is always something saddening in saying farewell, and we shall all be sorry when you leave us; my mother, I know, will miss you very much."

"And you?" he whispered anxiously, "will you be sorry?"

The beautiful head bent lower still, and the hazel eyes were completely veiled, as she answered tremulously,—

"Yes, indeed, I shall be truly sorry; the house will not seem the same when you are gone."

She dared not trust herself to look into his eyes, for she knew intuitively that all the love of his great, honest heart was struggling there, and she could not meet it, at least not yet.

Presently he spoke again, and to the girl, it seemed strange and unreal, so full was it of mingled passion and hope and fear,—

"Miss Grant," he said, "do you know what I am? To the world I am a painter, an artist, with his foot firmly planted on the first round of the ladder of success; a man who has a good prospect of making a name in the world of art. Viewed from another standpoint I am a mere nobody, a son of the people, without a single drop of good blood in my veins; beneath the notice of everyone who can boast of ancient lineage. I speak frankly, Miss Grant, because I have something to say of deeper import; a question upon the answer to which depends all my future happiness. Honor, it is useless to keep myself in further suspense; you must know—it is impossible that you have not guessed my secret—I love you. Ever since the day I met you first, I have known that for me there was but one woman in the world. Honor, what is my answer? Do you scorn me? do you turn away in contempt? I cannot offer you great wealth, my darling, nor a high rank; I cannot even boast of a long line of ancestors, but I love you, Honor. To me everything seems summed up in that one word. I do not ask you to share poverty or dishonour. Even if I misjudge my powers and fail in achieving fame, I can at least keep you in comfort. Honor, tell me, have I presumed too much on

your kindness? have I been mistaken in the thought which brought me such delicious bliss? did my eyes play me false when I dreamed that I saw in your face some faint glimmer of love? Do not torture me by silence, darling; tell me, will you be my wife?"

The girl still stood with dreamy, half-closed eyes, while he, with every nerve in his body palpitating, waited for the word which should doom him to misery or transform the earth into a veritable paradise.

For an instant she gazed into the bright, boyish face with its burden of doubt and fear; then once more her head drooped and she whispered shyly,—

"I think I have always loved you, Hugh."

He took her in his arms and kissed her with passionate kisses; then for a few moments they stood silent; their happiness was too deep for words.

Presently he said—

"My darling, I must see your father this evening. Suppose, for it is just possible, that he will not consent to our union?"

The girl shivered slightly.

"Why should he object?" she questioned.

Once again he kissed the cheeks which had suddenly blanched with an unknown dread, and whispered,—

"You do not understand; we love each other, and to us that is sufficient, but to him it may appear that an unknown artist is scarcely a fitting mate for Staniland Grant's daughter."

Honor placed her hand in his—

"I love you, Hugh," she said with a charming innocence, "and if my father will not let me marry you, I will never be the wife of any man. Hush, the others are returning; let us go down."

The Squire did not return until late in the evening, and though he appeared surprised at Hugh's request for five minutes' conversation, he made no comment, but led the way to the smoking-room.

"We shall be undisturbed here," he said, as he lit a cigar, and passed the box to Hugh, "and you can speak freely; has anything unusual occurred?"

"I do not know how my confession may be received, Mr. Grant," he commenced quietly, "but what I have to say I will put in as few words as possible. I love your daughter, and I have every reason to believe the feeling is reciprocal. I am young and strong, and though far from wealthy, not entirely dependent upon my profession, in which I may say without boasting, I have made a very favourable start. Will you give your consent to our marriage? Indeed, Mr. Grant, you can trust her to me; I love her dearly, and will do everything in my power to make her happy."

During this little speech, Staniland Grant made no sign, but sat smoking his cigar, and staring straight before him, with a calm, expressionless face. Taking the cigar from between his lips he said, gravely,—

"I am truly sorry, Mr. Mellish, to receive this communication; very sorry indeed, for I know you to be in earnest. Further, I will frankly admit I like you. You possess undoubted ability, and I firmly expect you to make a name for yourself. But all this is beside the question; my daughter is a Grant of Bardney, and as such can only marry with her equals. Do not be offended; I have no wish to depreciate your position; I am simply stating facts. For countless generations it has been the rule that the members of my family should marry only with those who possess an ancient lineage. We care nothing for wealth or rank; indeed I would refuse the suit of the richest peer in the kingdom, were he of recent creation."

Hugh bit his lips in impatience at such ostentatious display of exclusiveness.

"My dear sir," he answered mildly, "is not your daughter's happiness of the first importance? Surely you will not sacrifice her to such a monstrous fetish, which you choose to set up for your own worship!"

The elder man gazed at the speaker in surprise.

"You do not understand," he said coldly, "my daughter's first duty is to her family; whether

that duty be agreeable or otherwise does not enter into the question."

"Then you really mean to refuse your consent on the absurd ground that I cannot trace my descent from some individual living several hundred years ago?"

"You are at liberty to put it in that form if you please; I do not cavil at your choice of expression."

Hugh rose to his feet, and an angry spot glowed on each cheek as he answered hotly,—

"I consider your reasons foolish and ridiculous, and I give you fair warning, Mr. Grant, that with or without your consent, I will use every endeavour to make Honor my wife."

Staniland Grant looked at the youth with a curious smile,—

"You are excited," he remarked calmly, "after a night's rest you will look back with wonder on this boyish ebullition of temper."

CHAPTER IV.

HUGH passed out from Staniland Grant's presence in a mood of angry bitterness, though the Squire's contemptuous rejection of his suit had not been unexpected. He went straight to his room, though he had little idea of sleep.

"It is preposterous," he cried, "absurd—the man must be half a lunatic with his antiquated notions. Honor loves me and I can make her happy—what more does he require? If I were poor, or he could discover a flaw in my character, I could understand it, but this is ridiculous rubbish."

A vision of Honor, as she stood on the slope of the wooded valley, with her lovely head resting on his shoulder flashed before him, and a tender light illumined his eyes as he murmured, softly,—

"My darling I have won you, and no power on earth shall ever come between us."

He wondered if he should see her in the morning, or whether he should be purposely denied an interview; but he little knew Staniland Grant.

With a brief sentence to his wife, and a momentary twinge of compassion for Hugh, for he felt an honest admiration for the young man, the Squire dismissed the incident from his mind; it never occurred to him to imagine that Hugh, much less Honor, would dream of disputing his fiat.

The young man rose early, and entering the park, bent his steps instinctively towards the little gate, which had of late by a tacit understanding served more than once as a trysting-place.

Unless expressly forbidden by her father's commands he felt certain Honor would meet him there for the last time, and he was not mistaken.

The girl stood as if awaiting his coming, and as he approached a rosy blush suffused her cheeks, and the beautiful eyes looked the question she dared not formulate.

Hugh took the shapely hand and pressed it tenderly.

"My darling," he whispered, "you must be brave; I am the bearer of ill-tidings. I saw your father last night, and he refused utterly to sanction our engagement."

For a moment his voice faltered, but the next instant he broke into a passionate outburst of pleading. He painted in vivid colours the wretchedness and misery of his future life, if she left him to pass it alone.

"It is impossible," he cried, wildly, "that I should give you up. You are the light and sun of my existence; without you the world is a dreary blank. Honor, my darling, you will not accept this ridiculous refusal. It is based upon nothing but a fantastic whim, and with, or without your father's consent, I claim you as my wife. I love you Honor, and since those few sweet words fell from your lips I have been dwelling in paradise. My darling, you will never undo your own handiwork; you cannot be so cruel. Tell me, Honor," he continued, passionately, "that you will not recall your words, that you will marry me!"

The girl gazed into his face with moistened eyes.

"Hugh," she implored, gently, "reflect a little. I would not give you pain; but consider what you ask me to do. I love you, my darling, and away from your presence I shall pine as the flowers for the sunlight. My heart will thirst for your smile, as the parched earth for the refreshing dew; but I dare not do this thing you ask. My first duty is to my father. If he disapproves we must submit, however hard the task. Perhaps in the future when your talents have gained you a famous name, he will alter his decision, but until then we must wait patiently. On one point you may rest assured. Come what may, I will never marry anyone but you."

In vain he argued and implored; the girl remained deaf to his entreaties. If she married at all she would marry him; but she would not disobey her father's commands, and in this she was inflexible.

At last he took her in his arms and kissed her. "My darling," he said, hoarsely, "so long as your love for me continues I will never release you from your promise. I will move heaven and earth to make you my wife."

Just for one brief delicious instant her rose-red lips pressed his. Then he turned slowly in the direction of the house.

It was a dreary journey back to London, though the sun shone brightly, and the birds sang, and the fair English land was clad in her brilliant summer garb.

For the first time a sigh of disgust passed Hugh's lips as he entered his rooms, which appeared cold and cheerless.

He could not work. It seemed as if he had left all his energy at Bardney, and Mrs. Stokes, his landlady, wondered what had happened to chase the bright sunshine from his face.

One morning, shortly after breakfast, he was sitting as usual, staring dreamily into vacancy, when his landlady brought in a card, which was followed promptly by the owner himself.

Hugh sprang to his feet with a cry of surprise, and his face brightened.

"Mr. Mardon," he exclaimed, "this is indeed a welcome, though unexpected visit. Are you staying in town?"

Mr. Mardon replied that he came the preceding evening, and sat down with an air of embarrassment, which Hugh could not fail to notice.

"Have you breakfasted?" asked the latter. "I have just finished, but—"

"Thanks! I had breakfast at the 'Lion,' my usual stopping-place," and they again relapsed into silence.

Presently he remarked, with an ill-concealed attempt at ease,—

"So you did not take warning by my advice?"

"No! I carried out my intentions. I asked Mr. Grant to sanction my engagement to his daughter."

"And were refused?"

"Yes; he objected on the score of my birth."

"But your father was a gentleman?" tentatively.

"As far as my recollection serves, yes; but I know very little concerning him."

"You can trace him, I presume?"

"There should not be much difficulty."

"Why not do so? No discovery can make your position worse, as far as Staniland is concerned, and there is always a chance of something turning up in your favour."

Hugh eyed his visitor curiously.

"I never thought of it," he said, "but I can easily set the proper machinery in motion."

"I would do so at once," remarked Mardon, and as an after thought he added,—

"By the way, have you ever met Honor's brother Ralph?"

Hugh reflected an instant.

"No, I think not; what is his club?"

"The Junior Carlton."

"That is rather out of my line," laughed the young man. "Have you come to see him?"

Mardon's face clouded with an air of gravity.

"To speak truth, Mr. Mellish, I am a trifle uneasy. You know he is engaged to my daughter Ethel, but she has not heard from him for a long time. Yesterday I received a note from a friend, which induced me to run up to town for a few

days. Of course I have mentioned nothing of this at Bardney."

Hugh nodded.

"I understand. But what are you going to do? Have you been to his address?"

"Yes, and he has left some time; though he calls occasionally for letters."

"You might catch him at his club."

"Yes, I think I will make the attempt. Will you be at home this evening? I may be worrying myself unnecessarily, but in case there is anything amiss, I should like to feel there is someone on whom I could rely, and I know you can be trusted."

"Your confidence is not misplaced, Mr. Mardon; for your sake I trust your correspondent was mistaken, but in any case, you may rely upon me. And now tell me, how are they all at Bardney?"

"Which means, I presume, how is Honor?"

Hugh blushed; but he made no endeavour to parry the thrust, and listened eagerly to the scraps of information which his companion was able to supply.

Mr. Mardon remained to luncheon, and then took his departure, with the understanding that he would return during the evening.

In some mysterious way, this visit from Mr. Mardon had produced a good effect; it had braced him up, though he failed to fathom the nature of the change.

His visitor's strange errand had lifted him out of his fit of despondency; had provided something outside his own misery to think about.

That something queer had occurred, he felt sure. Mr. Mardon was scarcely the man to get started on a false scent, and he waited with considerable anxiety for his return.

The clock had just struck nine when the owner of the Grange reappeared and Hugh gathered from his face that he was the bearer of ill-tidings.

Mechanically he took the seat which Hugh proffered, and proceeded to light a cigar in silence.

Hugh did not urge him to speak, deeming it wisest to let him tell his story in his own time.

Presently Mardon withdrew the cigar from his lips and stared across the room.

"I cannot understand it," he said slowly, and to Hugh's imagination, almost painfully; "but I feel there must be something terribly wrong. I have seen him," he continued, with the air of a man talking to himself, "and he frightened me. He is weak and ill, and his face is haggard as that of an old man."

He paused as though the memory of the interview was too great for him.

"Did you tell him you had called at his late address?"

"Yes, and it seemed to excite him strangely. He said he had removed some time since; the neighbourhood did not agree with him; he had been ill, suffering from over-study, but was recovering and would write to me shortly."

"Did you not secure his new address?"

"No, he refused it, he seemed frightened to death. Mark my words, Mr. Mellish, Ralph Grant has been playing us false; and I intend to discover his secret. Staniland may rave as he pleases, but I am going to safeguard my little girl's interests."

"You will not communicate your fears to Bardney?" Hugh said.

"No; I will do nothing without proof. I may be wrong, and no one will be more honestly glad for Ethel's sake, but I am determined to get to the bottom of it, whatever the consequence." Then as if struck by an afterthought—"Why does he wish to conceal his address?" he asked sharply. "Does that look like honest dealing?"

"Perhaps he has been imprudent in money matters," Hugh suggested, "there need be nothing criminal in that."

"You are trying to throw me a plank, my lad, and I thank you; but had you seen that young man's face, you would recognize the hopelessness of the attempt. I am going back now to my hotel; in a few days you shall hear from me again; it is a relief to confide one's troubles to a friend."

Hugh grasped his hand warmly, and as he opened the door, whispered,—

"Do not drive him to extremities; remember that anything in the nature of disgrace will break his father's heart."

CHAPTER V.

SEVERAL days passed after Mardon's departure, without bringing Hugh any further news concerning Ralph Grant. He had settled down into his usual groove somewhat reluctantly, and was hard at work one morning when his landlady announced Mr. John Farquhar.

Hugh stopped painting; he did not recollect the name; but it was no longer an uncommon thing for complete strangers to enter his studio, and he stepped forward with a pleasant smile to welcome his visitor.

"Mr. Mellish, I presume," exclaimed the stranger. "My name is Farquhar—John Farquhar."

He was a tall man, unbowed by the weight of years which had passed over his head, for he had long since left the prime of his manhood behind. His hair was long and streaked with grey, and the same hue predominated in his beard, which he wore long and full. His cheeks were bronzed and roughened by exposure to the weather; his eyes were of that indescribable tint between blue and grey, but hard and cold, and Hugh noticed that his hands, though evidently accustomed to manual labour, were shapely and nicely moulded. His clothes were in correct taste, neat and good, and his whole appearance indicated that he was no stranger to good society. His voice was perhaps a trifle harsh, but there was a musical ring in it that Hugh liked.

"I trust you will pardon this liberty, Mr. Mellish," he began. "I fear I am trespassing upon your time, which is valuable, but if you will allow me, I will explain the cause of my intrusion in a few words."

Hugh bowed.

"Pray, make no apology," he said, "I am not particularly busy, and shall be happy to place my time at your disposal."

Mr. Farquhar smiled, and it was marvellous what a complete transformation his features underwent. The air of gravity and sternness habitual to it disappeared, and was displaced by one of almost womanly tenderness.

"You are very kind, but I shall not need to detain you long; the matter is exceedingly simple. Yesterday I chanced to pay a visit to the Academy, and was very much struck with a small picture treating of Australian scenery. Being myself partly an Australian, I wished much to purchase it, but unfortunately for my purpose, it was already sold. The artist's name was Hugh Mellish, and on my mentioning the subject last night at Lord Bristow's, one of his guests advised me to come here and see if you had any similar sketches amongst your collection. And now, Mr. Mellish," he concluded pleasantly, "you have the whole story."

Hugh's face lit up with a sunny smile. He was not yet *blasé* with success, and he felt a thrill of honest exultation in his heart, at this mark of appreciation.

"I thank you, Mr. Farquhar," he said, warmly, "and I do not disguise the fact that your visit affords me a very genuine satisfaction. You are quite welcome to overhaul my stock, both of sketches and pictures, and should you discover anything which your taste approves I should be delighted."

Mr. Farquhar bowed gravely.

"I cannot flatter you by pretending to be a connoisseur in art," he replied, "though I fancy I know a good picture when I see one; but, as I have already mentioned, much of my time has been spent in Australia, and your canvas recalled vividly to my mind many a scene which I would not willingly forget."

Hugh's eyes glistened.

"That is a bond of sympathy between us, Mr. Farquhar," he cried, cordially, "for I am an Australian; it is the land of my birth, and I rejoice to meet with a gentleman who thus shows his love for my native country."

The stranger laughed dubiously, and said,—
"I am glad, Mr. Mellish, you have not learned to despise the land of your birth; but time flies, and I know I must not keep you; if you will allow me, we will look over your collection of Australian scenery."

Somewhat to Hugh's astonishment, Mr. Farquhar appeared to take unbounded interest in them; two or three he gazed at long and earnestly, and finally laid them down with what seemed to Hugh uncommonly like a heavy sigh. At length they reached the end of the portfolio, and as Mr. Farquhar bent over the last of the finished sketches, Hugh noticed that his hand shook, and the ruddy glow fled from his cheeks, leaving him pale and haggard. Several seconds elapsed before he recovered his composure, when, pointing to the drawing, he said, in a husky voice,—

"This of course was drawn on the spot; there is no effort of the imagination here."

"No! I drew that shortly before I came to England; it has a very painful association for me," and his voice trembled slightly.

Mr. Farquhar's eyes looked the question he did not put into words, and Hugh continued,—

"It is the house in which my mother died."

"This, then, was your home?" The question was jerked out abruptly, and Hugh saw that his visitor was strangely agitated.

"Not exactly," he answered. "I believe I was born there; I have faint recollections of the place as a child, but my youth was passed in Melbourne, where my mother lived after my father's death. I was too young to remember much about it; but on my father's death my mother put his farm—an exceedingly valuable one—into the hands of a trusty overseer, and removed to Melbourne. Every year we spent a month or two at the old place, which, under the overseer's management, continued to flourish, and, on the last of these visits, she sickened and died. Excuse my emotion," he added, "but the subject revives painful memories."

"Your feelings do you honour," he said, "the bond between mother and son is the holiest one under Heaven, and it is easy to see that you loved your mother."

"You are right, Mr. Farquhar," Hugh cried enthusiastically; "for me, my mother presented all that was truest and noblest in the world."

"It is a pretty sketch," the other murmured; then raising his voice, "I presume under the circumstances, you would scarcely care to paint it for me!"

He spoke lightly, and yet Hugh fancied he detected an under current of meaning, almost of entreaty in his tone.

"No," he replied; "it has but one value in my eyes—the place of my mother's death. To a stranger it would be merely an ordinary picture, more or less interesting."

After this episode, Mr. Farquhar's interest began to wane. He selected and paid for, with a lavish generosity, two pictures, and then turned to go. But he did not depart; he stood as if debating some knotty problem.

Once or twice it really appeared as if he had worked himself up to the requisite pitch, but apparently his resolution failed, and he finally retreated, stammering out the hope that they would meet again.

Left to himself, Hugh passed in review, bit by bit, every trait of Mr. Farquhar's manner; his little tricks of speech, the wearied expression of his features, the odd hesitation of the last few minutes, and it puzzled him.

"The idea savours of absurdity," he murmured, "yet I half suspect his desire to purchase my pictures was merely a pretext to pay me a visit." He glanced at the cheque lying upon the table, and, blowing a heavy cloud of smoke from his mouth, laughed loudly. "At least, he paid well for his curiosity. But what nonsense I am talking! After all, the transaction is simple enough; why should I try to clothe it in mystery? Surely there is nothing remarkable in a man displaying an interest in souvenirs of his adopted country! Still, it was extremely curious how the sight of the old house acted upon him, one would almost fancy it possessed a personal attraction for him."

He resumed his walk, which for a moment had

been interrupted, and puffed vigorously at his pipe, as if the curling wreaths of blue smoke were likely to afford him inspiration.

Once more he looked at the cheque.

"John Farquhar," he mused. "I wonder where I can procure information concerning him. He mentioned Lord Bristow's name; perhaps I might learn something at the club."

Finishing his pipe, he dressed himself and went out. On his way to the club he had to pass Mardon's hotel, which led him to remember he had not seen that gentleman for several days, and he determined to give him a call.

Mr. Mardon was not at home. A telegram had arrived for him just as he was about to sit down to luncheon, and he had gone away hurriedly, leaving his meal untasted. His face appeared anxious, one of the servants said, as though he had received ill news.

"Did he go on foot?" Hugh asked anxiously.

"No; they fetched a hansom, and the driver rattled off at a smart pace."

Hugh wrote a note informing Mr. Mardon that he would remain at home during the evening, and requesting that he would call round; then he proceeded on his way, wondering seriously what strange turn events were now taking.

He found Lord Bristow at the club, and drew him aside to ask about Mr. Farquhar.

"Ah, he has paid you a visit? He was very much struck with that little sketch of yours at the Academy. He belongs, I believe, to the Rothshire branch of the family, but I know very little of him, save that he is enormously wealthy; made a tremendous fortune abroad, somewhere in Australia, I have heard; but he is a very reserved man and takes few people into his confidence. He is undoubtedly a thorough gentleman, and is cordially admitted in the very highest circles of society."

With this information Hugh was obliged perforce to be content, and, indeed, he really did not know what else he had expected to learn.

"By the way," his companion continued, "did you make Mr. Mardon's acquaintance, while you were down at Bardney? He is in London. I saw him this morning in a hansom, and he appeared to be in a desperate hurry, judging from the rate, at which the man was driving."

Hugh nodded.

"Yes, I knew he was in town; he called on me a few days since, and that reminds me I have an appointment with him which must be kept."

He bade his lordship farewell, and hurried off; he had no mind to be questioned concerning Mr. Mardon's affairs.

The afternoon wore on in a dragging manner; it seemed to Hugh, sitting there, that the evening would never come, and he was growing terribly impatient, for he could not get it out of his head that he was somehow on the eve of an important crisis, which would have a direct bearing on his future life.

Seven o'clock passed; eight; and still Mr. Mardon did not arrive, but just as Hugh was preparing to resign himself to the inevitable, he heard the front door open, and in another instant the familiar footsteps ascending the stairs.

Rising from his chair, Hugh crossed the room, and opened the door; but the words of welcome froze on his lips as he stared at the man, whose coming he had been so earnestly awaiting.

CHAPTER VI.

"GOOD HEAVENS, man," Hugh cried, as he half dragged Mardon into the room, and closed the door, "what is the matter! Have you seen a ghost, or have you suddenly been taken ill? Sit down and swallow this," and he poured out a glass of brandy.

Mardon drank the stimulant, and sank back in his chair, without a word.

His face was white; his eyes wore a startled, half-frightened expression, and his hand trembled nervously.

Hugh sat and watched him in silence, though his heart beat violently, as he vainly asked him-

self, what could have occurred to have brought about such a startling change.

Mardon remained for a long time, without moving, and when he spoke, his voice seemed strange and unreal.

"I have had a great shock," he began slowly, "and have scarcely recovered from it."

Breaking off abruptly, he added as if to himself,—

"Poor old Staniland! my poor old friend, he will never hold up his head again!"

Hugh let him mutter without interruption, though he hungered like a starving man for the information which Mardon alone could give him.

Presently his visitor spoke again,—

"You called at my hotel and found me out?" Hugh nodded.

"Yes! they told me you had received a telegram; it must have contained bad news!"

"It did! My poor girl! my poor old friend!" "I presume it had reference to young Mr. Grant!"

"It was from him. Listen, you shall learn everything; I am dazed, helpless; I know not which way to turn. This was the message,—'Come to 25 Cambridge Terrace, N.W.' at once; if you delay, you will be too late. RALPH."

"Filled with all sorts of painful forebodings I summoned a hansom, and directed the driver to lose no time in conveying me thither."

"The door was opened by a young woman, who with the remark,—'Mr. Roger Mardon! Mr. Grant is expecting you,' led me into a little sitting-room."

"Where is Mr. Grant?" I asked, gazing helplessly round; 'has anything happened?'

"Mr. Grant is in bed," she answered coldly, 'he is dying.'

"Dying!" I cried, 'and we are wasting our time here; lead me to him at once.'

"In reply to my angry exclamation, she left the room, returning directly afterwards, with a child in her arms, and bidding me follow, she led the way to the sick man's chamber."

"I had been already shocked by the woman's words, but I scarcely realised their full significance until I stood at Ralph's bedside."

"He lay quite still, save for his rapid, irregular breathing, and his eyes were closed. His face was white and cadaverous; he presented the appearance of a corpse."

"One hand with long, thin emaciated fingers, lay outside the coverlet; I bent over and touched it; it was icy-cold. I gazed at the woman in affright, and she instantly read my thoughts."

"He has had a bad attack," she answered slowly, 'he will revive soon, it is only a question of minutes.'

"She spoke quite connectedly, and I looked at her again in wonder. Who was she? At first I concluded she must be a trained nurse, but the child in her arms destroyed that idea, and I could conjecture no other; I was bewildered."

"As I stood watching intently, Ralph opened his eyes. They were dim and filmy, but gradually a pleased look of recognition crept into them, and he pressed my hand feebly."

"This is very kind," he whispered, with a great effort, painfully apparent to an onlooker, 'but I knew you would come, in spite of my recent ill-manners.'

"I begged him to compose himself, for in his weak state a trifling excitement might prove fatal, and it was evident he had something of extreme importance to communicate."

"A faint smile lit up his eyes, and he begged me by a gesture to raise him."

"I shall be able to speak with more ease," he said."

"The young woman put the child down and rearranged the pillows, while I raised him in my arms. The change of position brought on a fit of coughing, so terrible in its nature that I thought he could not possibly survive it, but gradually he grew calmer and fixed his gaze on me with a pitiable expression."

"I cannot say much," he murmured, 'and perhaps it is better so. Dear old friend, I have to beg your forgiveness; I have deceived you and my father, and may Heaven forgive me.'

"I looked at him with added interest, but

even then I had no suspicion. His next words threw a little more light upon the subject.

"Ask Ethel to pardon me! I have been false to her, and too cowardly to tell her the truth."

"His eyes closed again, and he lay quite passive, while I waited eagerly for the confession which was yet to come.

"Suddenly the cold fingers clung to mine with a tighter grasp and he exclaimed brokenly,—

"Mr. Mardon, I am dying; the room is growing dark, I cannot see you. Isabel, where is my boy? Let me touch him once more before I die. Mr. Mardon, these are my wife and child; you will see my father, my bonny little lad must not suffer for my sins. Isabel, kiss me once. We have not been very happy, Isabel, my wife, but we must not part as enemies; I cannot face the dark void with anger in my heart. This gentleman, Mr. Mardon, for the sake of old days will be your friend; trust him, Isabel, and be guided by his advice. Quickly, my wife, the shadows are deepening; it grows darker, my spirit waits only for your kiss, that I may know the past is forgiven."

"The woman leant over and kissed him, cerelessly it seemed to me; then she placed the babe in his arms. For a brief space the touch of his child's baby fingers gave the dying man a fictitious strength; he patted the soft, dimpled cheeks, and his own face glowed with the light of a holy joy. Even thus, with a tender smile on his lips, and the chubby pink fingers of the innocent child, twining in his long hair, Staniland Grant's son died."

Scarcely conscious of his words, Hugh said,—
"This boy of whom you speak is now the heir to the Bardney property."

"It will kill Staniland," Roger answered.
"Ralph's death is terrible, but this child will be even worse."

"What is she like—this woman?"

"A beautiful animal, as far as I could judge; but you shall see for yourself. We must make arrangements for the conveyance of the body, and then wire to Staniland. The woman must be prevented from visiting Bardney, at least until Ralph is buried."

"Will not that be very harsh to deny her the solace of following her husband's remains?"

Mardon laughed bitterly.
"My dear fellow, your sympathy is wasted; the woman has no feelings; she is a female Shylock, anxious only to exact her pound of flesh. I have kept her quiet for the night; in the morning you must come and help to tame her. Now I must go to the station."

"You have not yet apprised his father?"

"I dared not. We must hide the truth from him until—"

"Yes, it will be best," Hugh answered, "though it is a terrible business."

Having settled their plans for the morning, Mr. Mardon took his departure, and Hugh sat down to ponder the painful information he had just acquired.

If, as Mardon had more than hinted, the dead man's widow was of mean birth, Staniland Grant's objection to a *mesalliance*, would have lost its force, at least he would no longer be able to base his objection on the same grounds; Ralph's rash action had destroyed that. But was it not possible, nay, even probable, that this unexpected calamity would make the Squire more obstinate than ever, and cause him to use every means in his power to force Honor into some distasteful union? Hugh groaned heavily, for he knew in his heart that this was the more likely supposition of the two. Tired at length with this perpetual questioning to which he could give no satisfactory answer, he went to bed, for he had promised Mr. Mardon to meet him in good time in the morning.

Everything was quiet in Cambridge-terrace, when the two friends stopped at Number 25, and Mr. Mardon knocked softly at the door, which was opened by Mrs. Grant.

Hugh looked with a curious interest at the woman, who, more successful than himself, had managed to enter the Grant family; and one glance showed the accuracy of Mr. Mardon's estimate. She was certainly beautiful, but her beauty was of a bold, animal nature, which grated

upon him. She was tall and well-made; rather inclined to embonpoint, but not more so than her ample proportions demanded. She had an abundance of long black hair, rather coarse in texture, her forehead was broad, her eyes black and sparkling with a defiant expression; her skin was of an olive tint, tempered by the rich red blood which flowed beneath.

Hugh glanced at her lips; they were full and sensual, and, in repose wore a mocking look, which produced a disagreeable effect. Her hands though shapely, were large and coarse, and when she spoke, one noticed that her voice was harsh and discordant. Altogether, Hugh summed up, the very last person in the world whom Staniland Grant would desire as the mother of his son's child.

She acknowledged Mardon's introduction of Hugh with a slight inclination of the head.

"It is very kind of you," she said sarcastically, "and I suppose I ought to show my gratitude; but before you volunteer any further interference in my affairs, perhaps you will kindly explain exactly what it is you intend to do."

The two men looked sharply at each other, and Mardon motioned to his companion.

"My dear madam," Hugh began courteously, "we are friends of your late husband, and as such are desirous of helping you. I do not wish to hurt your feelings; you must already have suffered severely, but it is absolutely necessary to state the case clearly. As you know, your husband has not informed his friends of his marriage; indeed they are under the impression that he had pledged his troth to a lady living near his own home, and are even now looking forward to his marriage with her. Under these circumstances we feel sure you will agree that it will be best to postpone making a declaration of the real state of affairs, until the first shock of your husband's sad death has passed off."

Hugh rather prided himself upon the neatness of his little speech, but the woman's eyes flashed with fury, as she cried,—

"In plain English, you mean I am not fit company for my husband's people."

"Nay!" replied Hugh gently, "I meant only to point out, that shocked by their terrible bereavement they will be in no condition to hear this new story, and that your interests and the interests of your child might suffer in consequence."

"I understand," she laughed viciously, "and I tell you I have waited long enough; and now I mean to have my rights. I am Ralph Grant's widow, and my son is Staniland Grant's heir. Oh, I have heard all about it; I am not a fool, as Staniland Grant will discover to his cost should he attempt to defraud my child of his just dues."

Hugh tried in vain to pacify her; she would not listen; she made no pretence of grief or even wifely duty, but her husband's dead body should not leave the house unless she accompanied it.

In despair he tried a new plan.

"Of course," he said coldly, "you are at liberty to follow your own counsel, but as a friend, allow me to suggest that you are standing in your own light. Mr. Grant certainly cannot refuse to recognise your son as the heir to the Bardney estate, but he can refuse to pay one penny piece towards his maintenance, and if you persist in your intention he will most assuredly do so. On the other hand, if you give him a little breathing space you will have a much better chance of reconciling him to the position. You see," he concluded with a smile, "I am putting it simply as a matter of policy."

For some little time there was silence; she was evidently turning over this new aspect of affairs in her mind, and presently she said,—

"Perhaps you are right, but remember it is only a truce; do not think you can hoodwink Isabel Grant."

CHAPTER VII.

HAVING surmounted this difficulty, which had threatened seriously to interfere with their calculations, Hugh assisted his friend in his melancholy task, and accompanied him to the railway-station.

Grasping his hand, Mr. Mardon said earnestly,—
"I need not ask you to do all in your power to keep that woman in London, at least until after poor Ralph is buried; it would be a fearful thing to have a scene at the graveside, and I am afraid I could not trust to Staniland's self-control."

Hugh reassured him.

"I think she will hold aloof for a time, but she will not remain quiet long, and you must prepare Mr. Grant for her coming at no very distant period. She is evidently a disappointed woman, and if I am any judge of character will stick at nothing in order to obtain what she deems her rights. I think, too, I would inform Honor; she is a sensible girl and might act as a curb on her father's rashness."

Mr. Mardon promised that Hugh's suggestion should be carried out, and with a final injunction to be careful, he took his seat as the engine sounded its preparatory note of warning. Luckily there was no other passenger in the compartment, for he felt in little mood for company; his kindly heart ached at the thought of the misery which had fallen with such terrible force on his old friend. For Ethel he did not grieve much, in his heart he knew, though he scarcely cared to admit it, that he welcomed her freedom with an actual sense of relief, for the dead man had never been a favourite of his.

But he pitied the Squire whose cherished dreams had been so ruthlessly scattered, and still more, his heart bled for the gentle woman who had idolized Ralph as only a mother and sister can. For them, however, the worst was over; Ralph was dead; the lad they had loved with such tender devotion had left them, and all else was immaterial.

But for Staniland the heavier blow was yet to fall. His boy's death could be attributed to the action of Providence, and met with fortitude, but this disgraceful marriage, this alliance with plebeian blood was far worse than death.

The train drew up at the side of the little platform, and Mr. Mardon stepping from the carriage, found himself confronted by the Squire.

The two men shook hands in silence, and moved towards that part of the train which contained the coffin.

During the long, melancholy drive to Bardney, the bereaved father spoke never a word.

His face was hard and white, as though chiselled out of marble; his eyes presented a dazed appearance, but his lips were firm, and his bearing had lost none of its soldierly erectness.

He was the picture of a man grievously wounded, but whose iron will would not accept defeat.

At the Hall, Roger witnessed a very different spectacle.

Ethel, unable to remain alone, had gone over to Bardney, and the three grief-stricken women mingled their tears together.

They laid him to rest in the family vault, and as the mournful cortege wound slowly back to the Hall, Mardon breathed a deep sigh of relief.

That very morning he had received a telegram from Hugh to the effect that Ralph's widow was already growing restive.

Now, however, there need be no public scandal; if she came, Staniland could see her privately.

The next morning Roger felt that the truth could no longer be concealed. Mrs. Grant had not yet risen; Honor had wandered into the park, but he found Staniland in his library.

Something in his visitor's face aroused his suspicion, and he said bitterly,—

"Well, Roger, what is it now? Have I not yet drunk sufficiently of the cup? Is there still another draught? Come, man, out with your news, I am not a child."

Roger closed the door.

"Staniland, old friend," he said earnestly, "Heaven forgive me for being a bird of ill-omen, but someone must tell you, and better I than a stranger. Staniland, brace yourself, for to you I know my news will be replete with anguish."

"Go on, I am prepared."

"When your boy died, he left behind a child to bear his name and become the heir to the Grant estates."

"A legitimate heir!"

He spoke coldly, but his friend realised what a tremendous pressure he was putting upon his passions.

"Yes."

"And the mother?"

"She is a beautiful woman."

"Where is she?"

"In London. Mr. Mellish and I have kept her quiet so far, but she insists on coming here. Promise me, Staniland, old friend, that you will do nothing rash."

The Squire's face was a mask of stone, and he answered vacantly,—

"No, I will do nothing rash, but leave me now, Roger, I must think."

Angry as he was with the man's crazy notions, Roger could not withhold his pity, and he turned away with sorrowful steps.

In the grounds he met Honor.

"Have you seen papa?" she asked.

"Yes, we have just had a painful interview. Honor, my child, you must be very patient with him; he is in sore trouble. I have been to tell him that poor Ralph left a wife and child behind him, and you know your father's ideas on that subject."

"Is she coming here?"

"Yes, and I greatly fear the visit will cause unpleasantness."

"I will do my best," she answered thoughtfully.

The following morning Honor received a letter with the London postmark, and having read it, passed it to her father without comment.

It was from Hugh and was intended to prepare them for the coming of Isabel Grant.

"Dear Miss Grant," it ran. "Mr. Mardon has doubtless informed you of your brother's marriage. I am writing much against my will to say that his widow has just announced her intention of coming to Bardney to-morrow. I trust your father will pardon me, but in the hope that my presence may prove of some service, I intend accompanying her myself. Please make it plain to your father that it will be better to receive her, whatever the result; otherwise, I fear she may make herself very offensive. I need not say how deeply I deplore your bereavement, and if there is anything in which I can be of the slightest assistance, you have but to command me. Your sincere friend, Hugh Mellish."

The Squire read the note through and remarked,—

"Perhaps he is right, it will be better to see her."

They came in the afternoon. Hugh had hired a closed conveyance at the station, and driven straight to the Hall.

Staniland sent Honor to her mother, and received his visitors in the library.

His face was white and stern, but his manner towards Hugh was by no means unfriendly, and he so far overcame his repugnance, as to offer the woman a seat.

Isabel Grant preferred to stand, holding her child in her arms.

"You are Staniland Grant," she exclaimed, and the coarse voice grated even on Hugh's ear; "my dead husband's father. This is his son," pointing to the child maliciously, "and your grandson; I have brought him home."

Staniland did not reply at once, and she went on, with an outburst of passion,—

"Don't you understand, or have you suddenly been struck dumb? I am Ralph Grant's widow, and have come home with my child. I have been a fool long enough, listening to his silly talk about his high and mighty father, and I have had sufficient. I am going to take matters in my own hands now, and this is the first step. Where are my mother and my sister Honor? Do you keep them locked up? I could easily believe it."

The veins swelled in Staniland's forehead until they stood out like knotted whipcord, but to Hugh's surprise he still kept his temper under control.

"My good woman," he began, but she interrupted him savagely.

"Keep your good woman," she said in a vicious tone, "until they're asked for. I'm no 'good woman,' I'm Isabel Grant, the mother of the future squire of Bardney."

A deep red glowed in the man's face, and a painful fear flashed in his eyes, but he spoke with the utmost deliberation.

"I have listened to your insulting language, madam, with, I hope, exemplary patience; now, perhaps, you will condescend to hear what I have to say. When I learned of my son's clandestine marriage, I was not only astonished but alarmed. I feared lest his choice of a wife should not meet with my approval, though I little dreamed he had stooped so low. Since you have forced yourself into my presence I must, in common charity, believe that the poor boy's mind was temporarily unhinged; on no other ground can I account for his infatuation. However, we had better proceed to the business which has brought you here—the question of maintenance, and I would strongly advise you to remember that what I have to propose is final. To you, personally, I offer nothing. You chose to marry my son without my consent, if you have failed to realise your expectations, that is your concern with which I have nothing to do. With the child the case is different. Although I cannot permit it to live here I will relieve you of it and see that it is carefully brought up. I will find it food and shelter, and in due course charge myself with its education. If you like to—"

A shrill, mocking laugh from the woman stopped him.

"Are you mad," she cried, "to think I will accept such terms as these?"

"You have heard my offer," he replied coldly, "deal with it as you will, but make your choice quickly, I have already wasted valuable time."

She drew herself up to her full height and looked the Squire steadily in the face.

She was certainly very beautiful, but as Mr. Mardon had remarked, her beauty was that of a wild animal.

"From your son's account, Staniland Grant," she said vindictively, "I took you for a strong man, and a clever one, but I was deceived; you have not the wit of a baby. I came here, not to sue for mercy, but to demand a right. I was your son's lawful wife, and the mother of his child, but I am not fit to associate with you. You are proud, proud of your good name and family, and contact with me will defile you. You will not accord me my rightful position, lest my presence should contaminate you. You have dared my enmity, Staniland Grant, you shall have it, and Heaven pity you! for I will show none. You affect to despise my words as idle threats; you will see. Your pride is your idol, I will drag it to the ground, trample it in the mire. I will make your life so wretched that you shall long for death, and yet be afraid to die for fear of what you leave behind. Don't you understand? Pah! I will make my meaning plain. Look at this boy! When you die he is the head of the Grant family and the owner of Bardney. Ah! now you begin to see! I will devote my life to his training, and never fear but that I shall succeed. He will take your place, he will bear your name, for we called him Staniland. Look at me, and try to conjure up a picture of what your successor will be. I am not good enough, forsooth," she concluded bitterly. "Staniland Grant I tell you solemnly, the day shall come, when Bardney will be too vile a place for the scum of the earth to visit."

Without another word or look she turned to the door and swept out, leaving the two men gazing at each other in helpless perplexity.

Hugh was the first to recover himself, for Staniland sat like a man demented. A great fear possessed his eyes; the temporary rush of blood had left his face, and his limbs trembled as if with ague.

The woman's shaft had struck home. The horrid picture she had drawn with such fiendish ingenuity, was in his heart, in his brain; everywhere.

Hugh read his thoughts, and a great wave of pity swelled up in his breast for this man whose

cherished dreams and aspirations were so ruthlessly scattered, for as he looked he knew intuitively that Staniland Grant was a beaten, heart-broken man.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT the very time Isabel Grant was hurling her defiance at the Squire, Roger Mardon in the library at the Grange, was conversing with the stranger, who had shown such partiality for Hugh's Australian pictures.

Roger's face wore an air of mingled surprise and pleasure, and every now and then he gave a sharp glance at his companion, as though he half expected him to vanish into thin air.

"Well, Roger," exclaimed the stranger with a smile, "I have already put a dozen questions and you have not given me a single answer. How are matters over there?" and he pointed in the direction of Bardney.

Roger met the interrogation with another.

"Does Staniland know?"

"No! perhaps he never will. It is about that I have come to you. Remember, I am ignorant of almost everything. I hear, however, he has a son to succeed him."

"He had."

"Had! Is the young fellow dead?"

"Yes; it is a melancholy story. I fear poor old Staniland is in troubled waters at present, but I will tell you all about it."

"Half a minute! May I smoke? It is the effect of my solitary life. I have grown so accustomed to the weed that I find it difficult to do without it."

Scarcely waiting for Roger's approval, John Farquhar proceeded to fill a capacious pipe and, having lit it, leaned back in his chair prepared to listen to his friend's narrative.

As the story progressed his look of interest deepened, and, at its conclusion, he exclaimed,—

"By Jove, Roger, you may well say 'Poor old Staniland!' I suppose the woman was in no way suitable for the youngster?"

Roger shook his head sadly, and his manner conveyed a whole world of meaning.

Farquhar rose from the chair and paced the room, puffing vigorously at his pipe.

"If I had a son, Roger, the difficulty could easily be solved; he could marry Staniland's daughter, and everything would be made right."

"Too late," the other responded bluntly. "Of course if you had a son it would checkmate this scheming adventuress, but he would never secure Honor Grant for a wife."

"You speak confidently."

"Because I know. Honor has already made her choice. She is in love with a young painter, Hugh Mellish."

"Another *mésalliance* in prospective!"

"So her father thinks. He has forbidden the match."

"And will she defy him?"

"Not exactly; she will not marry without his consent. But if she cannot marry Hugh she will not marry at all."

"A girl's fancy; it will soon wear off."

"I think not, and I can read her character pretty well."

"But the painter. He will not be willing to wait indefinitely."

"You do not know him; he is a fine, frank young fellow, true as steel. But isn't this working rather in the dark? Remember, as yet, I am not aware you have a son."

"Dismiss any doubt on that head. He is in England, and, though naturally rather prejudiced, I am of the opinion the girl will think twice before she refuses him."

Mardon did not attempt to conceal his annoyance at this ill-timed levity.

"I fail to see your drift," he observed coldly; "your son will come into possession of the estate, and the woman will be baffled. There will be no injustice to Honor, she could not succeed under any circumstances; why make her position harder by trying to force her into an unwilling marriage?"

"Gently," Farquhar replied with a curious smile; "I said nothing about force, but I am

going to give her the chance. If she refuses to marry her cousin, I will do my best to enable her to marry the man of her choice."

Mardon's face brightened, and he stretched out his hand.

"That is like the old Farquhar of bygone days!" he cried. "With your aid, it will be strange, indeed, if we cannot induce Staniland to alter his decision."

"Has he seen the woman yet?"

"She was to come to-day, and is probably there at this very moment. Why not go over now?"

"You are sure Staniland will take it kindly?"

"I will answer for that, he will be overjoyed; you could not have arrived more opportunely."

"You will accompany me?"

"Yes, if you wish it; we will go at once." And, without giving his companion time to pause, Mardon opened the door and led the way from the house.

They walked sharply down to the little gate, where Hugh had passed such brief delicious moments, and then, at a more leisurely pace, they crossed the grounds in the direction of the Hall.

Honor, who had just left her mother for a few minutes, saw them approach, and stopped.

"Honor," Roger cried, "let me introduce my friend, and a friend of your father's, Mr. John Farquhar. Is your father at home? We have come expressly to see him."

The girl blushed as she returned the stranger's salutation, and, on his part, John Farquhar gazed at her with interest.

"Papa is in the library," she said slowly, "and I am afraid you will find him rather worried; he has had some visitors from London."

"Have they gone?"

"Yes. Mr. Mellish was one; he went out very hurriedly a minute before you came. I wonder you missed seeing him," and her face flushed a rosy red.

"Is he coming back?"

"He did not say, but I expect he will return."

"I think we will go to your father. Mr. Farquhar is one of his very oldest friends; and, to speak truth, our business is in connection with the matter which is troubling him."

He passed on with a cheery smile, which somehow suggested good tidings to the anxious girl, and followed closely by Farquhar, made his way to the library-door, at which he stopped.

Receiving no answer to his summons he knocked again, and pushing the door ajar, stepped inside, motioning to Farquhar to remain still.

The Squire sat in an attitude of hopeless dejection, and Mardon paused, frightened at the alteration in his appearance.

The proud look had gone from his eyes, the colour from his cheeks, his lips were white and tremulous, and his whole aspect was that of a prematurely aged man.

A wintry smile hovered momentarily across his features as he returned his friend's salutation, but the mockery was so apparent that he relinquished the attempt at deceit, and groaned audibly.

"I am glad you have come, Roger," he murmured, weakly, "she has been here, and oh! my friend, it is too awful. I am beaten, utterly beaten. She has proposed her conditions. I am to receive her here as one of the family. She is to live in the house, to associate with Honor and her mother, to be publicly acknowledged as my daughter. Fough! the woman has driven me half crazy."

"You did not consent to her terms?"

"No! I offered to take the child, and have him properly trained and educated, and she laughed in my face."

"And then?"

A cruel vindictive look leaped into the man's eyes as he exclaimed vehemently,—

"Roger! had she not been a woman I should have strangled her. Upon my word I doubt whether she be a woman or a fiend. She taunted me with my pride and helplessness at the same time. I could withhold my support, I could refuse to receive or even acknowledge her; but for all that she held the key of the situation. Think of it, Roger! that woman my master!

it makes my blood run cold. But for all that it is true."

"But what did she threaten? For of course she exposed her hand. These people always do."

"You shall hear. I am proud she says, I am afraid her touch will pollute me, and my fears shall be verified. She will take that child and make him the instrument of her devilish revenge. She will train him up in every kind of vice and moral leprosy. She will feed him on filth and garbage. She will make him a moral plague, and in the fulness of time this monster of her creation will take my place as the head of our house; he will be the representative of our family pride and our family honour."

Roger shuddered in spite of himself at the bare recital of such contemplated wickedness, and before he could speak Staniland continued,—

"Mellish has gone to try and use his influence; but I fear she will not yield a point."

Roger's next words made him look up with a start.

"I agree with you. From a woman so vile nothing is to be hoped; but is her power so great as she imagines? Is it not possible that you can hold her at your mercy?"

"How? The facts, as I read them, are plain enough. The boy is Ralph's lawful son, and as such is my legal heir. I cannot prevent him from coming into the estate at my death."

"My friend," said Mardon, with a gentle gravity, "light comes into the dark places, at the most unlooked for times. Can you bear to hear me say that this child is not your heir?"

"At the expense of my boy's honour! The remedy is worse than the disease."

"Nay, Ralph's honour is not at stake; but I must be still more explicit. Will it grieve you to learn that even Ralph was not the heir to the Bardney estate?"

Staniland gazed wildly around the room; his brain in a dizzy whirl.

"For Heaven's sake, Roger," he implored, "spare me this torture, my nerves are weak, shattered. I am not in a condition to follow you. Tell me, old friend, your meaning."

"I will; but first try and prepare yourself for some startling news. Do you remember poor John's mysterious death, which was never clearly explained? Suppose—"

A momentary glance of triumph shot into Staniland's eyes. Then he shook his head hopelessly.

"It would only mean waiting for two deaths instead of one," he answered.

"But if he had a son! Staniland, don't you see? John is alive and his son will be the next Squire of Bardney."

Before the astonished man could recover from his surprise John Farquhar Grant entered the room and clasped his brother's hand, while Roger quietly slipped out in search of Honor.

Half-an-hour later they were all assembled in the drawing-room listening to Farquhar's explanation.

"Remember," he began, "my return will make no difference in my brother's lifetime. Had my poor nephew still lived I should not have discovered myself; but under the circumstances it appeared the best thing to do. However, I shall not trouble you long. As my brother knows I have always been of a roving disposition, and the habit is a difficult one to eradicate. But for my son I should wish a different life. In the course of time, which I trust may yet be far distant, he will take his place as the master of Bardney. Meanwhile I would like my brother to take him under his charge. He is young, a trifle older I should fancy than my charming niece, and I think you will like him. There is one other matter, a delicate subject to handle I fear; but I must speak out, Honor—you see I frame your name quite easily—will you help me realise the only wish I have left in the world—to reunite the branches of our family?"

The girl's cheeks paled, and large, unbidden tears welled slowly from her eyes.

"Oh, Uncle John!" she cried, pitifully, "I am so sorry to grieve you, but I cannot—indeed I cannot promise you. It would be wicked to let you be deceived, and what you desire can never be."

The answer did not appear to disconcert him,

and he said with a curious smile stroking the girl's tresses tenderly,—

"I am afraid, my dear, I am too late with my proposal; I ought to have guessed there was another Richmond in the field;" Mardon stared hard at the speaker, "tell me, child, is it so?"

The girl blushed fiercely, but she was spared a reply, for at that moment there was a hasty knock at the door, and Hugh Mellish came into the room.

CHAPTER IX.

THE momentary embarrassment was relieved by Farquhar, who advanced to the young man with a cordial greeting.

"We have met before, Mr. Mellish," he exclaimed, "do you remember?"

Hugh did remember and said so, but his thoughts evidently were not with his one time patron; he was gazing with perplexed look at the Squire.

What had happened since his departure? He had left a broken man, bowed with bitter grief; he saw him now with a beaming smile and head erect; what had caused this miracle?

Farquhar glanced at his brother with an inquiring look, and then turned to Hugh.

"Mr. Mellish," he said, "do not allow my presence to be a check upon your communication, you have seen the woman, and your quest has proved fruitless. Is it not so?"

Hugh nodded. He did not understand Mr. Farquhar's position, but Staniland seemed satisfied, and he should be the best judge of his own affairs.

"She is as obstinate as a mule," he replied, "and will not give way an inch. The terms she offered are the only ones she will accept. I am to say she will remain in her lodgings until to-morrow at noon, and not one minute later for your final answer."

"Mr. Mellish," Staniland said, "you have proved a good friend to me, in my hour of bitter trial, and it is only right you should learn why I can afford to treat that woman with the contempt she deserves. That gentleman whom you know as Mr. Farquhar, is my elder brother, John Farquhar Grant, and the rightful owner of Bardney. Fortunately he has a son, who in the future will become the head of our house, and now you perceive how the woman's scheme of revenge falls harmlessly to the ground. If I may put myself still further in your debt, I would like you to visit her again in the morning to explain the fresh position of affairs. The offer which I made yesterday is still open, and if you can induce her to accept it, you will lay me under a lasting obligation."

Hugh's heart beat fast as he gave the required promise, and a wild, foolish hope sprang up in his breast, a hope which a few words from Farquhar converted into unutterable despair.

"As you already know much of our family history, Mr. Mellish, I need not apologise for proceeding with the story which your arrival interrupted. My son has met his charming cousin, and, which I must confess does not surprise me, has fallen in love with her. I am trying to persuade her that a marriage with him would be a splendid means of consolidating the two branches of the family."

Hugh's face glowed with an angry red colour as he said,—

"Permit me to remark, that as I have had the honour of appearing as a suitor for Miss Grant's hand, your confidence is rather misplaced."

"Ah!" returned the other coolly, ignoring Roger Mardon's gathering amazement, "that accounts for my niece's pretty confusion a few minutes since."

"Pardon me, John!" exclaimed his brother, "but you made a statement just now which I do not follow. Where has your son seen Honor, for to my knowledge she has never left Bardney in her life?"

"How can I say! I presume you do not shut the girl up like a nun; probably he made her acquaintance here. At any rate, my information points to the fact, that not only is he in love

with her, but that Honor actually led him to infer he was not indifferent to her."

The girl's pale cheeks flushed a vivid crimson, and she confronted her uncle angrily, but before she could speak, Hugh stepped forward and took her hand in his.

He stood erect with flashing eyes.

"Mr. Farquhar," he said firmly, "I have told you I have asked Miss Grant to be my wife, let me go a little further, and avow that we only wait her father's permission to be married."

"Is this so, Staniland?"

"Yes; Mr. Mellish but speaks the truth, and I honestly regret that my duty or my pride—call it which you will—compels me to withhold my consent."

Everyone, save Farquhar, was rapidly becoming uncomfortable, but his face still wore the same amused smile.

"May I ask," he said, with an appearance of deep interest, "the nature of your objection?"

"Certainly; I explained my opinions freely on the subject to Mr. Mellish. Against him personally I have no cause for complaint, nay more, I like him, but you know the value I have always attached to good birth, and unfortunately Mr. Mellish is not in a position to satisfy me on that head."

"And, candidly, that is the only ground for your refusal?"

"Yes."

"In that case I am afraid—I am afraid I must withdraw my own proposal, for I happen to be able to testify of my own knowledge that our young friend's mother was a lady of good birth, and his father belongs to one of the oldest families in the country. In fact I may say without exaggeration that it goes back quite as far as our own."

Hugh's head began to swim.

Was he dreaming? Had he heard aright? If this man could prove his words, Honor was his wife!

The very thought drove him wild with mingled joy and fear.

He felt the tender clasp of Honor's delicate fingers; he knew someone was speaking, but the voice seemed strangely unfamiliar, and he could not fathom the import of the words; his ears were filled with a continual buzzing, like the murmur of the sea.

Presently he saw Roger Mardon coming towards him, but it was a different Roger Mardon to the man he knew.

His eyes were bubbling over with joy and laughter; his face was wreathed in smiles.

Gradually he became aware that the others were closing round him, until Honor and he were the centre of a little group.

What had happened? What did it all mean? Was he losing his senses?

Suddenly he distinguished Mardon's words,—

"Hurrah! I knew it; I guessed it; I had my suspicions the very first time I saw him. John, you rascal, you are a fraud, a vile impostor, coming here with your story, frightening these youngsters out of their lives. But we'll forgive him, Hugh, this time, won't we? Don't you understand you young rogue. Why, bless me, the boy is gone deaf and dumb. Hugh, wake up; upon my word this is pretty treatment to accord a father who has come all these miles to see you."

Hugh started violently.

"Father!" he cried; "are you indeed my father?"

But his own heart answered the question, and the next moment they were locked in each other's arms.

It was better than any transformation scene, Roger declared with tears of joy in his kindly eyes, and there was no one to gainsay him.

"Honor!" said John Grant, with a merry twinkle, fondly patting the girl's cheeks, "will you refuse me a second time, if I ask you to marry my son?"

"You were far too late uncle," she responded, glancing at him archly, "Hugh does his own love-making."

He kissed the beautiful upturned mouth, and giving her to Hugh said laughingly,—

"There, take her away, we have many things

to discuss, and I doubt if your brain will stand business matters at present."

They wandered out into the park, careless whither their steps led, so long as they were together.

There was no need for speech; they loved each other and were happy.

Once a shade of sadness overspread the girl's fair face, and she murmured,—

"Poor Ralph! Hugh, we must not let our happiness make us forget my poor brother; promise me that you will do your best for his innocent child."

He kissed the tender, pleading face.

"Trust me, my darling, your brother's child shall not suffer," and he was amply repaid by the tender caress she bestowed upon him.

That night, after the others had retired, Hugh and his father sat in the library together, for there were many things which the elder man wished his son to learn.

It was a sad story to fall from a father's lips, a story of a wild, riotous, though not dishonourable youth; a father's stern displeasure; a gentle mother's broken heart; a final revolt against all parental authority; a new life in a strange world; a few brief delicious years of happiness, and then once more a fatal outburst of the old, wild spirit which had never been killed.

"But I was not all bad, my boy," he concluded sadly, "your dear mother never wanted for anything as far as physical comforts went. The farmer who looked after her property was secretly in my pay, and I took care she should have an ample income. Of you I never lost sight. I contrived without exciting suspicion, that you should have sufficient money at your disposal, and when you came to England, I communicated with some friends, who kept me constantly informed of your welfare. Within the last few days I have made the necessary arrangements with my lawyers, so that in the event of my death you will have no difficulty in establishing your claim to my property which is considerable."

"Father!" said the young man, "why should we part? If you do not care to settle down here let me come with you; I cannot marry Honor for another year at least; surely I may keep you company for that time. You shall take me to Europe, and we will be together until my darling is ready for me."

John Grant's eyes moistened, and his hand shook.

"You really mean it, my boy! Then it shall be so, and you shall tell me of your mother, and the old days. After all, I shall have one more glimpse of happiness before my sun sets."

The next morning John Grant announced their plans, but before they returned to London, Hugh paid a flying visit to the little village where Ralph's widow, ignorant of the strange turn of events, waited to receive Staniland's answer.

For a time the young man found his task very difficult; the baffled woman was furious at being thus checkmated; but when at length, she realised that her threats were empty words at which Staniland Grant could afford to laugh, she reluctantly gave way, and consented to accept Hugh's offer, which was that she should renounce all claim to the child, and that she should receive a yearly pension, subject to certain conditions which he drew up.

Just twelve months later, the grounds at Bardsey Hall presented an unwanted spectacle.

Bright-hued flags swelled gaily to the breeze; the sounds of merry music floated on the air; long tables of primitive structure groaned and creaked audibly, beneath their ponderous burdens; right royal rounds of beef flanked lordly turkeys and fat capons, flagons of nut-brown ale that had stood in the Bardney cellars for years, were waiting to be opened, and presently came the tramp of many feet and the sounds of laughter and good-natured jollity, for the Squire's daughter had just come from the church, and though she had not changed her name, she was no longer Miss Honor, but Mrs. Hugh Grant, and all the sturdy farmers for miles around, with their wives, and the young men with their sweethearts, were assembled to do her honour.

Years have come and gone since then, and

John and Staniland Grant sleep with their fathers.

Other changes too have taken place; the patter of little feet is heard on the wide stone stairs, and bursts of childish laughter, and in the deep bay window, comfortably ensconced in an easy chair, sits an old lady with white hair, and a placid smile on her quiet face.

Sometimes uncle Roger comes, and the children fly to him, for his capacious pockets are always filled with sweets, dear to childish hearts, and when these are disposed of he talks to Hugh and Honor about his Ethel, who is married to a neighbouring Squire, and has made Roger grandpapa long since.

Now and then the group is enlarged by a fair, delicate lad, with large, blue eyes, home for the holidays, who thinks there are no people in the world like Honor and Hugh, who repay his devotion by a love which amply compensates him for the loss of his own parents.

[THE END.]

FACETIE.

SOME people do not recognise their obligations when they meet them.

HE: "Give me a kiss, won't you?" She (hesitatingly): "Well—I will, if you won't give it away."

GRAMMAR TEACHER: "In the sentence 'Where am I at?' what is 'at'?" Scholar: "A superfluous, miss."

COOKE: "A woman who can make a good pie-crust is a jewel." Baker: "A sort of paste diamond, eh?"

"No news is good news" is an old time-honoured saying, but it won't do to run a daily paper on that principle.

DENTIST (to patient, who has opened his large mouth to its widest extent): "Pardon me, sir, but I am not a lung specialist."

WIFE: "What kind of cards do you think make the best calling cards?" Husband (absent-mindedly): "Aces."

WINKS: "What's the matter, old boy? You look as if you didn't get sleep enough. Got a new baby?" Jinks: "No. Got a daughter old enough to have callers."

"GLORIOUS! Old fellow, so her father said yes when you asked him!" "Yes." "How did you put the question?" "Asked him if he had any objection to me."

JOB LOTT: "One never loses anything by keeping his engagements punctually." Kirby Stone: "My experience is he is apt to lose half an hour's time waiting for the fellow."

"THAT young widow Flison is quite a dashing creature, don't you think?" "I guess you are right. She dashed my hopes most effectually when I asked her to marry me."

NELL: "How do you know she is in love with Jack?" Belle: "Because she told me he was perfectly horrid, and if she were in my place she wouldn't have anything to do with him."

FOND MOTHER: "Big! Do you think so? I think he is small for his age. Talk! Oh, yes, he talks, but he hasn't said anything remarkable yet." Visitor: "What a wonderful child!"

First Gentleman: "Did you call me a liar, sir?" "Second Ditto: "Certainly not; my courtesy would not allow me to do any such thing. I am glad, however, that you catch the idea."

PROUD FATHER: "My boy is the most truthful little fellow that ever lived." Cynicus: "I believe it, I have heard it said that the suppressed qualities in the father always cropped out in the son."

PHYSICIAN: "The truth can no longer be hidden, madam. I am obliged to tell you that your little son is—er—weak-minded. That is—well, it must be said—he is an idiot." Mrs. Highupp: "How fortunate it is that we are rich. No one will ever notice it."

SOCIETY.

THE Queen has ordered a portion of the wedding trousseau for the young Princess Victoria Melita.

THE Queen is to open the Royal College of Music early in May, shortly after her return from the Continent.

THERE are to be two State Balls and two State Concerts at Buckingham Palace. One ball and one concert will be given early in June, and the others in July.

IT is expected that most of the naval presentations will be deferred until the second Levee, which is to be held early next month by the Duke of York, who will also hold the third one.

THE Grand Duchess Xenia's wedding is to take place after Easter—that is to say, about the end of April. It is to be a most magnificent affair, the grandest wedding that has taken place since the aunt of the present bride-elect wedded the (then) Duke of Edinburgh.

THE Duke and Duchess of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha intend coming to London for the month of June, and will occupy their own suite of apartments in Clarence House. It is probable that their son-in-law and daughter, the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Hesse, as they will then be, will visit London during that month.

THE Duke and Duchess of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha's visit to Gotha, accompanied by their only son, Hereditary Prince Alfred, was in every way a success. The people were delighted with their new ruler, his clever and amiable wife, and his nice soldierly-looking son, while their Royal Highnesses were most appreciative of the enthusiastic reception accorded to them.

AT the Drawing Room the "Royals" all assemble by a quarter to three in the Sovereign's closet (a room the walls of which are covered with beautiful miniatures of great historical interest), and when the Queen arrives they walk in procession to the Throne Room, conducted by the great officers and the members of the household in waiting.

IN the way of setting people at their ease, the Queen is known to be an adept. She greatly dislikes a visitor who is shy and colours or looks agitated when addressed. At the finish of the interview the queen generally gives a small bow, or offers her hand, and then turns slightly to one side to save the very trying necessity of an entirely backward exit from her presence.

THE marriage between Prince August of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha and the Archduchess Caroline Maria of Tuscany, will probably take place in the spring or early summer. Prince August, who resides chiefly in Vienna, was born at Rio de Janeiro on December 6th, 1867, and is the second son of Prince Ludwig August of Coburg, and Princess Leopoldina, a daughter of the unfortunate Emperor Pedro II. of Brazil.

THE Emperor and Empress of Russia have invited the Prince and Princess of Wales to St. Petersburg for the marriage of their daughter, the Grand Duchess Xenia, and it is not improbable that the Princess of Wales, who is greatly attached to her niece, will be present, previous to her return to England.

THE Queen considers that Florence is the most pleasant place of residence in all Italy, the neighbourhood being studded with villas, country houses, and nice gardens; while outside the old line of walls is one of the most magnificent promenades in Europe; but the river Arno, which divides Florence into two unequal parts is not at all times sweet, for many drains flow into its waters.

THE Mediterranean cruise projected for the Princess of Wales and her daughters will be followed by a stay at Athens, after which the Royal party will pay a brief visit to Venice. They will probably be absent from home until the latter end of April or the beginning of May, as the Princess is very anxious to visit her sister, the Duchess of Cumberland, at Gmunden, before returning from the Continent.

STATISTICS.

A HEALTHY swallow devours six thousand flies every day.

MORE accidents occur to the right leg than to any other limb.

THE catacombs of Rome contain the remains of about six million people.

IN a square inch of the human scalp the hairs number about one thousand, and the whole number on an adult scalp is about one hundred and twenty thousand.

THE annual consumption of water used in extinguishing fires in London is about 19,000,000 gallons. The cost of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade is rather over £136,000 a year.

GEMS.

IN this world a man must be either a hammer or an anvil.

RESPECT is a safeguard which protects both great and small alike.

NOTHING raises the price of a blessing like its removal; whereas it was its continuance which should have taught us its value.

SOME persons follow the dictates of their conscience only in the same sense in which a coachman may be said to follow the horses which he is driving.

EVERY man, every woman, every child, has some talent, some power, some opportunity of getting good and doing good. Each day offers some occasion for using this talent. As we use it, it gradually increases, improves, becomes native to the character. As we neglect it, it dwindles, withers, and disappears. This is the stern but benign law by which we live. This makes character real and enduring.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

POTATO MARBLES make a very pretty garnish for a dish of baked fish. Wash, pare and cut raw potatoes into little balls with a vegetable cutter; let them soak in cold water for an hour; dry them in a towel, then fry in deep fat; drain and sprinkle with salt. Fry them in a frying basket and do not hurry the cooking, as they should be cooked through, and not brown too quickly on the outside.

ORANGE CREAM.—To half a box of gelatine, or its equivalent, add a quart of milk and cream; half cream if possible. Soak the gelatine for an hour in milk enough to cover it; then dissolve by bringing the remainder of the milk to a boil and stirring it in. Add the yolks of two eggs and sugar, and stir a little longer, then strain and set away to cool. Squeeze the juice of three or four oranges, with the addition of the zest made by rubbing the rind with a lump of cut sugar to absorb the essential oil, which is the flavouring principle, or use a spoonful or two of home-made extract if you have it. Whip the cream, and when the custard is cold, stir in the orange juice, then the cream: mould and set in ice.

SOOTCH OATCAKE.—Take one breakfast cupful of oatmeal, one teaspoonful dripping, a pinch of baking soda, half teaspoonful warm water. Put the oatmeal in a basin, mix in a cup the dripping, soda, and water; stir this in among the meal and knead a rather soft paste—more water may be needed. Knead this again into a round ball; put the ball on the table, put dry meal above and under it, and pull it out into a round cake with the right hand. Roll it out then quite thinly, taking great care to prevent the edges from breaking. Now rub the surface over with plenty of dry oatmeal, and cut the cake in quarters, turn these over and rub the other side with the dry meal; put the cakes on a hot griddle to cook on one side only; put them on a toaster and toast the other side.

MISCELLANEOUS.

LONDON was the first city to use coal.

LOBSTERS are terrified by thunder, and seek deep water during thunder-storms.

SMOKING is permitted in the prisons in Belgium only as a reward for good behaviour.

LATIN is used in all the civilised countries in the world for physicians' prescriptions.

PRISONERS, when arrested in Morocco, are required to pay the policeman for his trouble in taking them to gaol.

THE Hollanders are the greatest tea and coffee drinkers, using two hundred and forty ounces to each inhabitant every year.

THE opal is now fast losing its bad reputation as an unlucky stone, and the result is that opals are more popular now than ever before, and their price has risen, especially in the case of those that are distinguished for brilliant flame tints.

IT is probable that Sir John Cowell, Lord Bridport, and Sir Edmund Commerell will go to Coburg about April 17th in order that they may be in attendance on the Queen at the Royal wedding.

JUST over one of the splendid entrances of the Grand Opera at Paris, there is a young plane tree in full leaf and about three feet high, growing from a chink in the masonry. Some bird is supposed to have deposited the seed of the tree there. Both the director and the architect of the opera have decided that the tree shall be permitted to live and flourish, inasmuch as the entrance has been greatly improved in appearance by it.

THE German Emperor has never been crowned either as King of Prussia or as German Emperor, and the imperial crown has yet to be made. The kings of Italy, Spain, Belgium, Bavaria, and Saxony have none of them been crowned, and it is a curious fact that the sovereign who makes most frequent use of his crown is the most simple, unaffected, and democratic of all European rulers, King Oscar of Sweden, who is obliged to don it each time he opens the Parliament at Stockholm.

A PEARL, to be perfect, must be perfectly round or drop-shaped; have a perfectly pure white colour; be slightly transparent; be free from specks, spots, or blemishes, and possess the peculiar lustre characteristic of the gem. A pearl of one grain weight satisfying the above conditions is worth from 2s. to 2s. 6d., while their value increases with their weight, and a pearl of 30 grains would be worth from £80 to £100. Round pearls above this weight are of such rare occurrence that they command exceptional prices.

THE shooting fish is a native of the East Indies. It has a hollow cylindrical beak. It frequents the sides of the sea and rivers in search of food, from its singular manner of obtaining which it receives its name. When it spies a fly sitting on the plants that grow in shallow water, it swims to the distance of four, five, or six feet, and then, with remarkable dexterity, it ejects out of its tubular mouth a single drop of water, which seldom misses its aim, and striking the fly into the water, the fish makes it its prey.

THE girls of the Perugian highlands believe as firmly as any heroine of Theocritus that a person possessing a lock of another person's hair can will pain, disease, and even death to the owner of the hair; and thus when maidens give their betrothed lovers the customary plaited tress, it is virtually their life and all their power of suffering that they give into those trusted hands. If the man should prove unfaithful and disease descend upon the unhappy woman, she is not, however, utterly lost; the experienced matrons of her village have means to transfer the complaint to a tree, to an animal, or to cast it into running water. The patient must rise in the early dawn, touch a certain plant in a certain manner, saying, "may thou wither and I flourish again;" or bind her complaint to a tree in a given fashion taking care never to pass again before that tree lest the disease, recognising its former possession, return to her again.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

B. C.—You are not responsible.

POLE.—We can find no recipe of the article.

HUBERT.—Yes; a licence would be required.

CONSTANT READER.—We do not give addresses.

CECIL.—It is illegal to use a tricycle on footpaths.

ELAIE.—The husband is entitled to the whole of the money.

ANXIOUS INQUIRER.—There is no process we know of for the purpose.

JULIET.—Wash them first in cold water, afterwards rinse in hot water.

JAMIE.—No; the full six months' notice should have been given at the time.

SENTIMENTAL SCIE.—The red fuchsia is "taste;" the blue violet faithfulness.

G. B. E.—We do not know what you mean. You must explain more fully.

ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—There is no other way than by making inquiry.

BLUE-EYED JEAN.—They are both diminutives of Jane, the feminine of John.

ANXIOUS ELLA.—Take skirt in from the body, wash and iron; no other process serves.

DAN AND DON.—Daniel is Hebrew, Donald Celtic; they have no connection whatever.

PEDRO.—The validity of a will is not affected by the death of executors or witnesses.

JUDY.—A domestic servant may give a month's notice at any time during the month.

WORRIED FRANCY.—Much too intricate an affair to be dealt with here. Consult a solicitor.

OSCAR.—1. The two witnesses may be men or women. 2. The difference is one of fees.

A REGULAR READER.—The Crimean War commenced in March, 1854, and peace was concluded in April, 1856.

A MARTYR.—Sufferers from rheumatism often find relief by eating freely of celery.

P. Q. O.—The man is not liable to any penalty unless he represents himself as a solicitor.

LORENA.—Your only remedy is to put your clothes in a large cotton bag and boil them so.

S. M.—The Amazon is the widest river in the world, being fifty miles wide at the mouth.

MARIA.—Soak the feet in hot water and rub them with kerosene and lime water.

ONE IN DOUBT.—As you have offered to accept one month's wages, you cannot go back from that.

BOB BALDWIN.—If it has been acted upon by both parties, it is binding on them, no matter when signed.

LOVER OF THE "LONDON READER."—In Scotland subsequent marriage of parents legitimates child born previously.

ONE IN A FIX.—Write to the Superintendent Registrar for both districts named, stating the name and year as far as you know.

ALBERT.—We know of no legal reason why an undischarged bankrupt should not be elected as churchwarden.

R. S. V.—It would be impossible without personal instructions and several months of training and practice.

JOSEPHINE.—To remove rust from flat irons, soak them in, or rub them with kerosene, and polish with scouring brick.

POOR BERTHA.—You are perfectly certain to have a red nose if you lace tight, as that causes indigestion, which is one of the first causes of a red nose.

DELICATE DORIS.—Yes, take some purifying medicine, avoid indigestible food, over exercise at work or play, take no stimulants, and live regularly.

A. F.—A jury in a criminal trial in Scotland may return a verdict of "Guilty," or "Not proven," or "Not guilty."

DICKIE'S MISTRESS.—It is almost impossible to say what the cause is. It may be hanging in a draught, which would cause a cold in the eye.

BERESFORD.—"Cloture" is a French word and means "closing." In a legislative sense it signifies closing or shutting off debate. "Cloture" has the same meaning.

BELLA.—Let the cage be well sanded. Possibly the cage is too small. For the present you had best adhere to a plain diet of canary seed.

KATHLEEN.—It will wash like a pocket handkerchief, only use a mild soap, and do not boil or use the water too hot. Thoroughly cleanse and thoroughly rinse.

LENA.—The case has passed beyond the possibility of anything being done by yourself under advice which we might have given.

DUNSTAN.—We advise you to pay the sum demanded; any resistance would lead to your being dragged into Court, and subjected to heavy expense.

FELIX.—Marriage on a Sunday in Scotland would certainly be legal, if the ceremony were duly performed by a clergyman after due proclamation of banns.

INQUISITIVE ONE.—The air of "Whistle an' I'll come to ye, my lad," was composed by John Bruce, a well-known fiddler in Dumfries towards the close of last century.

ENDYMION.—Equal parts, say one ounce each, of Epsom salts, tartaric acid, carbonate of soda, and powdered loaf sugar, all bruised fine, and keep in tightly corked bottle; dose a teaspoonful.

DICK SWIVELLER.—If you are really a sub-tenant, and did not agree to pay taxes when you took the house from the principal tenant, you cannot be legally made to do so now.

DISTRESSED MOTHER.—We are not acquainted with any charitable institution that would take the child off your hands merely because you are in poor circumstances.

FEROUS FINLAY.—If your wife and her sister are the only children of deceased, and he has altogether omitted to mention the furniture in his will, it falls to be divided to them equally.

G. B.—Neither eldest son nor any other member of the family can legally object to the position the father gives while in life in the business and business premises to certain of his children.

A VERY OLD SUBSCRIBER.—As good a thing as you can use for softening the leather of boots is castor oil well rubbed in; this is often employed in hot climates, where the leather is apt to harden and crack.

ALARMED ALAN.—Except you can prove that the brute was known to be a vicious one and had previously bitten someone, your brother would not be held entitled to compensation for the damage done to him.

SOME TIME.

There's a past, a present and a future,
In every human life;
And the future may come to us laden with joy,
Though the present be filled with strife.
We may live in the years that are coming,
In the days that have yet to dawn;
We may laugh at the sadness and sorrows
We have known in the days that are gone:
Some time,—

In the future,— Perhaps.

The past is a part of our history,
The present we're living to-day;
But the future lies out and beyond our reach—
Of it no mortal can say.
Though we may have sown the tares in the past,
And are reaping the harvest now;
By the strength we are given, we may reach yonder heaven,
Where a Crown shall adorn our brow:
Some time,—

In the future,— Perhaps.

The past may have had its sorrows and clouds,
The present its bitter alloy;
But the future is something we have yet to live,
And it may be filled with joy.
The clouds may obscure, for a moment, perchance,
The sun, which is always shining;
We may yet see the day when they'll all roll away,
And show forth their silver lining:
Some time,—

In the future,— Perhaps.
J. H. S.

LELIA.—Blackheads are merely a symptom of a congested system; for a local application hold face over bowl of steaming water, then rub with rough towel, and next apply some spirits or toilet vinegar.

J. M.—The grocer must not only have the word "Margarine" in big bold letters on the cask, but also printed conspicuously on the paper he wraps it in; failing in either of these things he is liable in heavy penalty.

INTERESTED.—The expression "A1" is taken from the symbols of "The British and Foreign Shipping List" of Lloyd's. "A" is used to designate the condition of the hull of a vessel, and the figure "1" to denote the efficient state of her anchor, cables, &c.

NEDA.—Not knowing what caused the stains, impossible to say with what you should try to take them out. Probably the best thing to do, if the garment is worth the cost, is to have it cleaned, re-dyed and waterproofed by a professional.

OLGA.—To half a pint of furniture oil add a quarter of a pint of spirits of turpentine, and a quarter of a pint of vinegar; mix well, and with a woollen rag, dipped in the mixture, rub the wood, moving as much as possible with the grain of the wood.

T. W.—Plantagenet, the name given to a family of English Kings, was taken from planta genista, the broom, a sprig of that plant being worn as a badge by the father of Henry I.; the Plantagenet Kings were the Henries, from I. to VI.; the five Edwards the three Richards and John.

A PERPLEXED READER.—Before going in she should draw up will directing how her property is to be disposed of at her death; if that is left in charge of responsible persons, or is confided to the care of the officials of the home, its directions will be scrupulously obeyed; directors could have no claim except the will gave them one.

IGNORANT BILLY.—A century consists of one hundred completed years; consequently on December 31, 1900, nineteen centuries were completed, and January 1st following began the year one of the twentieth century.

ACTING MAD.—No stock companies are kept at local theatres now; travelling London parties, playing sometimes one and occasionally a round of pieces, occupy the house in turn; your only chance is to enter into communication with the secretary of one of these companies.

BEAUMONT.—You must cease from singing altogether for a time, and as soon as you find by an occasional attempt that your vocal organs are once more under command you must begin by practising easy scales daily, never going higher or lower than you can reach with ease; in all probability you will find your voice is to descend into a baritone or bass.

BEATRICE.—We presume you have reference to the picture called "The Trial of the Countess of Beverly," which was designed to represent the trial of the nun, in Sir Walter Scott's poem, who escaped from the convent to follow the fortunes of Lord Marmion in the guise of a page. When deserted by him she is taken back to the convent, and is sentenced by those in authority to be buried alive in a tomb.

C. H.—Sir Colin Campbell was raised to the rank of Lieutenant-colonel as early as 1837, twenty years before the Indian Mutiny; he afterwards passed through the Chinese and Sikh wars, next through the trying Crimean campaign, where he was a brigadier-general in charge of the Highland Brigade; he went out to India in 1857 as Commander-in-Chief of the Forces there, and it was in that capacity he effected the relief of Lucknow.

HATTIE.—A simple recipe for making grape wine is the following: Put twenty pounds of ripe, fresh-picked, and well-selected grapes into a stone jar, and pour on them six quarts of boiling water. When the water has cooled enough, squeeze the grapes well with the hand. Cover the jar with a cloth, and let stand for three days; then press out the juice, and add ten pounds of crushed sugar. After the wine has stood for a week, strain, and bottle it, corking loosely. When the fermentation is complete, strain it again and bottle it, this time corking tightly.

GILBERT.—The chief engineer is subordinate to the captain in all that concerns the navigation of the ship; that is to say, if the captain desire him to go faster, or slower, or stop altogether, he must obey, but protects himself by entering the instruction he has received in the log-book; he is not, however, subordinate to the captain in anything that concerns the safety or efficiency of the engines or boilers; if the captain ordered him to do something that he knew would injure these, he is not bound to obey, but must again protect himself by an entry in the log; similarly the captain has no authority over the stokehold staff in the stokehold; that is, where the engineer is chief.

PUZZLED HESTER.—The etymology of *bric-a-brac* is considered vague. The name is believed to come from the old French expression "*de bric et de broc*," which means "from right and from left;" from hither and thither. The word *bric* signifies, in old French, an instrument with which to shoot arrows at birds; and some etymologists derive the word *brac* from the verb *brocancer*, to sell or exchange; the root of which is Saxon, and also of the origin of the word "broker." The real signification of *bric-a-brac* in pure English is declared to be second-hand goods, but it has in recent years been used to indicate objects of some artistic value made in olden times, and much esteemed or prized by modern collectors.

ONE IN TROUBLE.—So much has been written upon the subject of domestic relations, especially in regard to the harmony which should be maintained between husband and wife, that it would seem almost useless to make any suggestion of our own. Still, we can say, as others have said before us, that all bickering should be sedulously avoided. Quarrels between married people before their own sons and daughters produce a very bad effect upon their observant minds. They are apt to lessen the respect all children should entertain for their parents, encourage them to make displays of their own tempers toward each other, and render their home so much the less attractive. Contentions between man and wife, brothers and sisters, and other members of the family household are as profitless as they are injurious to all concerned.

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